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THE
BLUE CLIPPER:

OR,

THE SMUGGLER SPY.

BY ROGER STARBUCK,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS.

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| 383. THE SPECTER SKIPPER. | 401. THE ICE FIEND. |
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THE BLUE CLIPPER.

CHAPTER I.

THE RENDEZVOUS IN THE HILLS.

ABOUT sixty miles to the south of Vera Cruz, near the coast of Mexico, a tall mountain rears its head, which, seen from the ocean, presents a grand appearance.

A number of conically shaped rocks, abounding in hollows and cavernous retreats, extend sloping from the main peak toward the Mexican Gulf, forming a sort of semicircle, which nearly incloses a small bay at this point.

Among these rocks, when the wind is strong, and the white seas send the spray careering half-way up their summits, few navigators would dare to venture.

Up to the middle of the year 18—, however, the pearl-fisher would occasionally resort here for the treasures of the deep. One night a column of lurid flame and smoke was seen bursting from one of the peaks, followed by a succession of deafening reports that made every rock in the bay tremble as if about falling to pieces.

The frightened pearl-fishers, together with the natives inhabiting this part of the coast, fled, fearing an explosion or an earthquake. The phenomenon occurring at intervals afterward, they removed altogether from this locality, deeming it too perilous for occupation.

Among the rocks, guiding a small skiff, on a clear evening in 18—, was a man enveloped in a cloak. The tide was running strong, yet so skillfully was the light craft directed, that she scarcely seemed to feel the influence of the current.

Reaching a strip of beach at the base of one of the rocks, the man, securing his skiff, mounted the elevation.

At the top there was an opening, through which he

descended by means of a rope ladder to the distance of ten feet.

The lower end of the rope touched a rugged floor of rock, as was shown by the sound of the man's feet upon it. All was darkness here. Out of this darkness a rough voice said:

"Is that you, Wilkins?"

"Ay, ay."

Instantly a lantern flashed, revealing the face and garb of the speaker. He wore a Guernsey shirt, a glazed hat and duck pants, the latter confined round the waist by a belt, in which were a long horn-handled knife and a pistol. The face was severe and stern, the eyes black and sunken, the forehead low, cheeks bearded.

His first movement was to haul down the rope, his next to pass through a narrow passage on the right, leading so nearly perpendicularly downward, that both he and his follower were obliged to walk carefully, to keep from stumbling.

Threading this passage, fully sixteen yards long, they reached a rock-ribbed apartment, in every respect resembling a large cavern, except that the floor was boarded, and neat shelves, holding miscellaneous articles, ranged along the walls.

It was about thirty by forty feet in size, and lighted by several iron lamps, secured to the wall. Around the base of these walls were benches, upon which sat, reclined and slept about sixty rough fellows, their reckless, dare-devil looks matching with those of him who had just arrived. While the garb of all—consisting mostly of dark flannel shirts, and canvas pants—was nearly alike, their faces were of varied types—Spanish, American, English and Mexican.

Meanwhile he who had been termed Wilkins, following his conductor to a deserted angle of the apartment, where there was a small table, sat down thereby, where a conversation in a low voice took place between the two.

Wilkins wore a mask, which he did not once remove. His face, therefore, was invisible, but the broad, muscular figure and well turned limbs told of youth and strength.

"So Government is fitting out more cruisers after us, you say—eh, Wilkins?"

"Ay, ay, Captain Malo; and my advice to you is to look out for yourself."

"Blast me, if I ain't half a mind to turn from smuggling to piracy!" said Captain Malo; "might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Don't know, though, but what smuggling pays the best."

"It certainly does. Your last speculation was a good one I hope you will be able to square accounts with me."

"I always pay my debts," answered the captain, laughing. "especially to such a useful ally as yourself. My next 'spec' will be the running of a heavy cargo of sugar up the Mississippi. Mind *you keep your eye on me!*"

As he spoke, he deposited in the visitor's hand a bag, the clinking of which betrayed the nature of its contents. Wilkins received it with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Now, then, how about that other business? Did you try *him?*"

"Ay, ay. I *sounded him*, carefully at first, getting bolder as I proceeded."

"The result?"

"Well, at first he seemed the pink of honesty, etc., do you see, but thinking I could detect through all this, by the sparkle of the young fellow's eye— By the way, he was a blasted fine-looking chap, and has a wonderfully penetrating sort of eye, which seems to go right through you, and—"

"Confound it, man!" exclaimed the other, impatiently—"never mind about *his eye*, but proceed."

"Well, then, seeing he kind of admired the free, jovial smuggler life, I kept on, and finally I actually won from him a half consent to join us."

"Good! Ho! ho! Mr. Harry Wand."

The conversation was continued.

Finally Wilkins rose to leave.

"Men," shouted Captain Malo, to the rough band ranged about the benches, "three cheers for the man who helps us under double colors!"

From the benches the whole band sprung simultaneously, cheering until the roof of the cavern rung!

"Death to the traitor who should betray him!"

Three more cheers. The swarthy Spaniards crossed knives, the Mexicans showed their teeth, the Americans turned their heads sideways, the Englishmen growled like bull-dogs.

Wilkins then bowed and departed, passing through the opening in the top of the peak by means of a long stiff rope ladder.

Just as he gained the outside of the bay, the whole mass of rocks was lighted by a lurid gleam, a heavy, rumbling sound was heard, and smoke and fire-flashes were seen to issue from one of the conical peaks.

Wilkins now pulled several miles until he glided alongside a small sloop—a mere sail-boat in size.

“Well, señor, did you see the volcano?” said the Spanish captain of the little craft. “Did you satisfy yourself that it’s there?”

“Ay, ay; but come, my good fellow, trim your sails, and away we go. This is not a safe place for any craft.”

“Right, señor,” answered the captain.

As he spoke, he trimmed, with the help of a lad with him, the little craft, which was soon gliding northward.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

ON the morning after the scene described, a revenue cutter—the Roland by name, went bowling out of the harbor of Vera Cruz, with the stars and stripes at her mizzen.

The cutter was a neat-looking craft, carrying several guns.

She had a spanking breeze, which filled her mainsail and her canvas forward, sending her gallantly upon her course, which was in the direction of New Orleans.

Her captain, a young man of twenty-five, walked his deck with quick strides, apparently buried in deep thought. Although rather sharp featured, he was not unhandsome, while his frame, strong and muscular, betokened strength.

The cutter was about two leagues from land when a vessel was sighted in the distance, proving to be a cutter much like the one already described.

She was the United States revenue cutter the Argus, one of

the many, which, at that period, were cruising, to break up an extensive system of smuggling secretly carried on along the gulf coasts.

The outlaws, however, were so cunning that, with the exception of the breaking up of a few small parties, they had baffled every effort of the Government at detection.

The usual signals were exchanged, the two vessels hove to, and a boat put off from the stranger, was soon alongside the other.

In the stern-sheets was the commander, who, boarding, seemed well acquainted with the captain.

"Seen any thing yet, Watson," he inquired.

"Nothing, particular. A suspicious-looking schooner was sighted, a day or two ago. We chased her, but couldn't overhaul."

"Ay, ay, they are sharp fellows. Where bound now?"

"To New Orleans, to recruit."

"So am I. As the wind is fair, too, I must not delay. Mr. Wand," he added, beckoning to a fine-looking young midshipman, of twenty or thereabouts, who had accompanied him, "get the boat ready."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the youth, coloring, as he touched his cap to Watson, who had bowed to him.

"That young fellow," remarked Captain Bond, "is a puzzle to me—of late he has seemed so absent and thoughtful."

"How long have you noticed this change?"

"Ever since we last sailed from New Orleans. I half believe he is in love with that northern beauty there—Mary Clare. I have seen them together."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes; but, of course I may be mistaken."

"No, you are not," muttered Watson to himself, the moment the other captain had departed. "The worst of it is, they used to know each other in New York, and I even suspect that, young as he is, they are engaged."

It may as well be stated that the captain's suspicion was correct.

Harry Wand—the son of a colonel, who had fought bravely in the war of 1812, had first been introduced to Mary Clare, when she was fourteen and he but seventeen, at the house of

a mutual friend. The father of Mary, an old New York merchant, had looked favorably upon the intimacy between the young people, as Harry, though rather wild, was a promising youth, and would probably rise to distinction in the navy, where he had been 'breveted' midshipman at the age of thirteen.

Later his father had died nearly bankrupt, an institution in which he had invested large sums having failed.

Mr. Clare, however, who was a man of high principle and good sense, did not care for this, so long as Harry was industrious. The engagement therefore between the young sailor and his daughter remained the same, without any effort on the part of the father to break it.

In a year, Harry had said, he hoped to make Mary his wife.

Having a proper degree of pride, he had declared that he would not marry until he was able to support the young girl without her father's assistance. He had permitted Mr. Clare to invest a little money left to him in stocks, which promised well. For the rest he trusted to his profession. "Promotion would come soon!" he said, with all the ardor of youthful hope—he believed in a short time he would be made second lieutenant aboard the Argus.

Disappointment! A senior midshipman, from another craft, was put in the place *he* had expected to fill.

No wonder this provoked him, and that to his Mary he often complained of the tardiness and stupidity of the Government.

She endeavored to comfort him, but somehow failed. He seemed to grow moodier every time she saw him—seemed thoughtful and absent, as if busy with mental planning.

Meanwhile, Captain Malo, the smuggler, had sought him, and, as shown, hinted at the rich profits of his lawless occupation, without yet exciting in his mind any suspicion that *he* was concerned in the lawless trade.

Matters were thus when the two cutters—the Roland and the Argus—arrived almost simultaneously at New Orleans.

Captain Watson, attired in his well-brushed uniform, did not fail to visit Clare, and endeavor to interest Mary.

The lonely girl tried to seem cheerful, although it was plain her thoughts were occupied with another—with Harry Wand,

who had never before remained so long absent from her, after the arrival of his vessel in port.

Hours passed—the day went by—still he came not.

Her father went to the Argus and inquired concerning the young man.

The answer was that he had left the vessel at morning, and had not yet returned. Next day and the next—he was still absent.

Mary was nearly distracted. Harry had seemed moodier than ever, when they last parted. Was it possible that he had destroyed himself?

She dismissed the thought; then came the fear that others had injured him, that he had somewhere met with foul play.

It was a melancholy sight to see the color fade from Mary's cheek, the light from her eye.

She shunned society, shutting herself in her chamber for hours at a time. Vainly her father endeavored to cheer her—vainly Captain Watson trimmed his whiskers, and put on his most lively manner. Mary's only comfort was the little miniature of Harry Wand, which she carried in her bosom, and which, when by herself, she would take out and kiss again and again.

The strange disappearance of Wand was, among naval men, a frequent theme of conversation. Young as he was, his merits as a sailor, and certain daring deeds he had performed, now and then, when occasion offered, had won for him a reputation.

Meanwhile Captain Watson exerted himself to please Mary. To say that she liked the man would be untrue, and yet he had certain traits which interested her. He was an excellent conversationist, had some some wit, and was full of life and sparkle. Although he could not draw her mind from the one engrossing subject, nor bring back the color to the pretty cheek, yet his magnetism was felt.

Her father, noticing the beneficial effect of his presence on the young girl, encouraged his visits, and was glad whenever he came.

Thus time went on until a year had passed.

Business kept Mr. Clare in New Orleans still, at the mansion he had hired.

Meanwhile the smuggling system seeming to strengthen rather than diminish, made trade very dull.

"Have you heard the news?" said Captain Watson, one day to Mary—his vessel being at this time in port.

The young girl was seated upon the veranda of the mansion, which commanded a good view of the gulf. Her small, white hand, listlessly clasped, rested upon her lap, her luxuriant black hair fell in heavy masses down her shoulders, forming a peculiar contrast to her clear complexion. Meanwhile the large brown eyes, turned seaward, were sad and thoughtful—the snowy brow now and then contracted into a slight frown, yet not enough to mar the superior loveliness of the face.

"No," she answered, half turning the lithe waist to look at the captain, who stood by her side.

"Well, the smugglers, hitherto a myth, have taken shape—have turned to timbers, blue jackets and sea-boots."

She half smiled, not wholly comprehending him.

"In a word, we Government cruisers have come across a suspicious craft—a low-hulled clipper schooner, the DOLPHIN, which, from information obtained, contains a formidable crew of smugglers. We are all in chase of that craft, which, I can assure you, Miss Clare, is a wonderful sailer. From stem to stern she is painted BLUE, so that, at a distance, her hull seems to mingle with sky and water! She has but lately appeared, and is a saucy craft to catch. She'll give us all a long chase."

"What are you doing here, then?" said Mary, a little mischievously. "I should think *you* would be after this wonderful BLUE CLIPPER also!"

"So I am. For that very reason I am now in port. When last seen, the BLUE CLIPPER was heading hitherward. I am watching for her, and hope I may be fortunate enough to make her crew also look blue."

The captain then departed.

Mary remained on the piazza. By and by up came the noon over the eastern seaboard, throwing a long flood or pathway of silver light across the water.

Some of this light, extending to the garden, fronting the piazza, threw a soft, mellow luster over the shrubbery, full of fragrant blossoms and fruits. The garden contained an acre

of ground, beautifully and tastefully ornamented with gravel paths, broad, narrow and winding, with marble statuary, fountains, and flowers. It was inclosed by a white fence, containing two gates—one opening upon a carriage-path and the other upon the main path for pedestrians.

Beyond, the land, covered with a carpet of beautiful grass, sloped downward to the edge of the sea, where it terminated in a white, sandy beach, full of snowy pebbles.

Thinking of Harry Wand, Mary sat, far into the night, looking seaward. What *had* become of him? She recalled to mind his noble face and form, exactly as he looked when they last parted; the brow clouded, the eyes showing a singularly mixed expression of gloom and tenderness, every time he turned his gaze upon her. Then he had gone away, and—alas! was she destined never to see him again?

While occupied with such thoughts, she beheld something long and slender glide between her and the moon, far out at sea!

It was a sail.

This was no uncommon sight. She merely glanced at it, then retired to her apartment. Poor girl! Slumber seldom visited her long, now. She had not slept four hours when she waked. The gray light of dawn was just beginning to creep upon the sky in faint, red streaks. Her window commanded a view of the sea. She looked through it, then uttered a slight cry of surprise.

There, not more than half a league distant, was the very schooner Captain Watson had spoken to her about—a vessel painted blue from stem to stern—the BLUE CLIPPER!

Women admire daring. Mary could not keep from smiling to herself at the courage of the schooner's captain, venturing so near a Government cruiser; for the blue clipper was in reality merely screened by a high ridge of land to the right of the mansion, from Watson's vessel, and an American frigate lying not two leagues beyond, by one of the city wharves!

Dressing herself, the young girl walked out on the piazza.

The peculiar form of the schooner riveted her attention. The hull, while low, projected along the center, curving amidships, and tapering in a lengthy line toward the bows,

which were sharp and shaped exactly like a sword-fish, the boom resembling the weapon of the creature named.

While still watching the vessel, she heard a step. She looked up, to behold a tall, manly form by her side, the face nearly concealed by a straw hat, with a fluttering black ribbon round the crown. The rest of the attire consisted of a blue jacket, with the figure of a miniature silver cask worked upon each shoulder, white duck pants, confined round the waist by a blue sash, white stockings, and slippers of a bright blue color.

At sight of this apparition, the girl would have screamed had not the strange visitor raised the slouched straw hat.

Harry Wand stood before her!

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING ACCUSATION.

For a moment Mary could not utter a word. Surprise and joy locked her speech.

The young man advanced another step, and she threw herself upon his bosom.

"Oh, Harry!" she murmured, the tears coursing down her cheeks. "Why have you staid away so long?"

"I could not help it. Duty kept me."

"And could you find no way to call on me—no way to send me word where you were, all this time?"

He colored. The same gloomy look she had noticed when they last parted, settled upon his face.

"I could not. But you had company. Captain Watson, I dare say, has called frequently."

"And is it possible you are jealous?" said Mary, in voice of reproach.

"You enjoyed his visits."

"Yes; as I would have enjoyed seeing a monkey. The captain is something amusing."

Her eyes beamed tenderness upon him. Their expression soothed him, and his brow cleared.

"Now tell me *where* you have been for so long a time?"

He shook his head.

"What did you think of my coming so suddenly upon you?" he said, evasively.

"You certainly took me by surprise."

"The balcony is easily reached by climbing one of the sculptured pillars on the other side."

"You took this way I suppose to startle and surprise me. It is like you."

Her hand rested upon his arm, the lovely face was turned up to him.

Suddenly a hearty voice was heard behind them.

"Halloa! why, what means this? Harry Wand, as I live!" and Mr. Clare appeared.

The young man colored and started, half in confusion.

Then he accepted the merchant's extended hand.

"Glad to see you—very glad, upon my word," said Mr. Clare. "Where the dence have you been to?"

"I—I—have been on duty," stammered the young man.

"In the name of a thousand wonders, what kind of duty?" inquired Clare, surveying the speaker's peculiar uniform. "What is the meaning of that cask, instead of an anchor, upon your collar?"

"You will excuse me, sir, if I decline answering that question."

"Certainly. Had I know it was a secret I should not have asked."

Bang!—from the blue clipper, at that moment.

Mr. Clare started, and for the first time noticing the vessel, almost bounded off his feet.

Captain Watson had told him about this craft.

"What is the matter, sir?" Harry coolly inquired.

"The matter? And is it possible that you, a naval man, have not yet noticed yonder vessel? She is a notorious smuggler."

Wand turned, and taking a small spy-glass from his pocket, leveled it at the vessel.

"A nice-looking craft," said he.

A flash and a puff of smoke from one of the schooner's ports. Another gun boomed over the sea.

"I must bid you good morning," said Wand. "Before I go, I have a favor to ask, that you will consent to my union with your daughter, immediately."

"You are rather sudden, my dear sir," answered Mr. Clare, "but I am sure, if Mary is willing—"

"Oh, papa!" interrupted the blushing girl, hiding her face upon his shoulder.

"That means yes, I suppose," said the merchant, smiling. "Meanwhile, before we say further upon the subject, let us watch the movements of yonder saucy craft. Upon my word, her captain must be a bold fellow to venture so near our government vessels. I do not believe they see her. I think I will go at once and inform; or rather you had better go, Harry, as you are younger and spryer."

"There is no need of my going," he answered. "The blue clipper has already been sighted."

As he spoke, he pointed to the masts of Watson's revenue cutter, which were now seen appearing round a point of land to the left.

"A smart fellow, that Watson!" exclaimed Mr. Clare: "you never catch him asleep."

"Nor will he ever catch the clipper, sir," said Wand. "Good-day."

"Are you going in pursuit of her, too?" inquired Clare. "Where is your vessel?"

"Her anchor is already apeak, sir," replied Frank. "She is not far from here."

He lifted his hat to Mary.

"I may come this evening, again," said he, "and perhaps not for two or three days."

Mary accompanied him to the door.

He snatched a hasty kiss, and she watched him as he disappeared swiftly over the elevation to the right of the house.

Then she joined her father on the piazza.

Their gaze was turned toward the blue clipper, which, in one minute, had spread her mainsail, while both her foresail and foretopsail were quickly sheeted home.

Swinging round to the north-east, she soon vanished behind the ridge. Meanwhile there was Watson's cutter, gallantly tossing the white water in chase.

When opposite the mansion, a square-built form was seen on the quarter-deck, bowing to Mary and her father.

It was the captain.

In a few minutes this craft was also hidden by the ridge.

A quarter of an hour elapsed ere the blue clipper again hove in sight, speeding like an arrow on a south-east course, with the wind now upon her quarter.

She was full a league from the ridge, ere Watson's cutter was again seen. Both vessels now had all their canvas set but it was plain that the cutter was no match for the craft, which soon disappeared far away in a blue mist oceanward, leaving the cutter many miles astern. Mary and her father watched the vessels until they were out of sight ere leaving the piazza.

"I saw nothing of Wand's vessel," said Mr. Clare; "it is very strange, unless, indeed, he went in some other direction to head that blue rascal off."

The night which followed was quite dark.

It was about ten o'clock when the door-bell rung.

A minute later, Wand, enveloped in a cloak, and attired in a gray suit of citizen's clothing, was ushered into the drawing-room, where sat Mary and her father, talking over the late event.

With a glad cry, and blushing deeply, the young girl rose to welcome her lover.

"Without further prelude," said Wand, when he had returned the salutation of the two, "I have come for my bride."

"Are you out of your senses, Harry?" said Mr. Clare; "it is ten o'clock at night."

"I know it."

"And you would marry my daughter to-night?"

"Ay, sir; the sooner the better," replied he.

"What say you to this, Mary?" said Mr. Clare, laughing.

"Well, really," said Mary, blushing, "I think Mr. Wand is rather hasty. I—in fact—I have made no preparations."

"Ay, ay," answered Wand, "I understand that. You shall know the cause of my seeming in such an unreasonable hurry, after the event. Your friend, the Rev. Robert Waldron," he added, addressing Mr. Clare, "can perform the

ceremony at once. We can take a carriage and go there, immediately."

"At least wait until to-morrow," said Mr. Clare.

"Nay," said Mary, blushing like a rose, "I dare say Harry has good reasons, and if—"

"Tell your reasons now, young man," said the merchant, "and I will no longer refuse."

"Begging your pardon, sir, I can not do that, now."

At that moment the door-bell again rung.

Hasty steps were soon heard coming up the stairs. In another minute, Watson, accompanied by his lieutenant and a midshipman, entered the apartment.

Wand stepped back a couple of paces, eying the newcomers, keenly.

"*You are my prisoner!*" said the captain, advancing.

Wand drew a revolver.

"What means this?" cried Mr. Clare, while Mary, with a shriek, rushed to her lover's side.

"It means that in the person of Harry Wand, you see the captain of the blue clipper!" replied Watson.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLUE CLIPPER.

WHEN Wand left Mary and her father, after his conversation with them on the piazza, he had repaired to the beach on the other side of the ridge of land, running parallel with the sea. There a small boat, containing six men, awaited him. The men were sturdy-looking fellows, attired in Guernsey frocks, with blue cloth caps upon their heads. Round their waists were belts, containing knives rather too long for the "innocent" sheath-knives usually worn by sailors. In a word, they were evidently intended for other work than the cutting of rigging and rope-yarns.

"Give way, lads," cried Wand, springing lightly into the stern-sheets; "lively, my good fellows."

The men bending to their oars, made the boat fly.

Soon it was alongside the clipper, which had come bowling round the ridge of land where it projected into the sea.

Wand was soon aboard, and his boat hoisted.

"In good time, captain," said his first officer, advancing "the cutter is after us."

Wand soon had his vessel booming seaward.

"Call all hands," said he. "They must be ready, as there is no knowing what might happen."

"True. If we should happen to lose a spar, the cutter would overhaul us, in which case?"—looking inquiringly at the captain.

"We would have to fight to the death, sir," said Wand, showing his teeth.

All hands came on deck. There were a hundred fine stalwart fellows, a few Portuguese and Spaniards among them, but most of them Americans.

"Men," said Wand, "the hounds are after us. I do not think they will overhaul us, but, if they should, we must fight!"

"Ay, ay, hooray, hooray!" cheered the band—a hundred knives flashing in air.

"Remember our motto is to either conquer or go down with the blue clipper!"

The handsome face of the speaker wore a resolute expression, showing that he meant what he said.

"Ay, conquer or sink!" growled a Cape Cod man among the crew; "that's the word!"

Again the cheers of the men went rolling through the sea mist.

They gathered round their young captain, their knives clashing as they crossed them.

He exerted over them a strange influence—the influence of a man of strong character. They loved him, and would have gone through fire and water to serve him.

While a strict disciplinarian, he was ever kind and considerate, and would never resort to violent measures in controlling his men unless actually compelled to do so.

Fore and aft he kept his little schooner in the neatest trim, every rope being coiled in its place, and the decks holy-stoned to a virgin white. Even the jack-stays on the yards, to say

nothing of the ringbolts below, which were polished to shine like silver, were so clean that they fairly glistened.

Having dismissed his men, Wand now had cloud upon cloud of canvas piled upon the schooner, which tore through the waters like an arrow, scattering, in showers, the silver spray about her bows.

Soon the cutter was lost sight of, far astern.

Wand then tacked, standing north-west. He enjoined silence throughout the vessel, as it was his intention to beat up to New Orleans, and he might pass the cutter on his way.

There was a thick mist now upon the water. The young captain, therefore, had careful look-outs posted in the bows and in the foretop.

In about an hour, the creaking of yards and blocks was heard, right ahead.

"Keep off!" whispered Wand to the helmsman—"carefully, my man—there, that's it!"—as the vessel fell off a couple of points.

The captain then ran forward, jumping upon the bow.

All was as still as death, aboard the schooner, the dusky crew standing as motionless as statues, by tacks and braces, ready to obey the slightest command.

Suddenly Wand started as if he was shot. Right ahead of him, he beheld the tall masts and huge black hull of an American frigate!

Immediately, however, he recovered his self-possession, for, while, from her enormous height, the frigate was to him plainly visible, it was evident that the schooner, owing to her blue color and smaller size, could not be distinctly seen from the war-vessel.

Springing to the helm, he kept the schooner off another point, so that he would pass diagonally away from the frigate, and yet not enough so to excite the suspicions of those aboard.

"Ahoy, there! what vessel's that?" came in a rough hail from the larger craft.

"The ROLAND, United States cutter," answered Wand, through his trumpet.

"Heave to, if you please; will send a boat aboard?"

"Ay, ay!"

Tom Bend, the Cape Cod man, aboard the schooner, stood

by the fore-sheet, grinning from ear to ear. He was a queer-looking fellow, with great joints all over his frame protruding beneath his clothing, and with a swarthy face, the chin of which looked sharp enough to split a pine board.

"Ay, ay, it is!" muttered the fellow to himself, protruding his chin across the lee rail; "guess them chaps will git 'ay, ay!' afore they board this craft."

Just then another sound, ominous to all hands, was heard right to leeward.

It was the roaring made by the bows of another vessel coming straight for the schooner!

Wand was out upon the jib-boom, and beheld the outlines of the cutter looming up through the mist!

He was, as it were, between two fires—the cutter on one side of him, coming up, and the frigate on the other.

In this dilemma the nicest seamanship was required.

"Luff a little!" was his quiet order to the man at the helm.

The schooner was now running along on a straight line, right between the two vessels.

"Ahoy, there!" came from the frigate; "why don't you back your main yard?"

Wand not answering, the suspicions of the frigate's commander were evidently excited, although, owing to the thick mist and the change in the schooner's course, she was now invisible to him.

There was a flash and a puff of smoke, then the crash of a gun followed by a crash to leeward.

The cutter's jib-boom had been carried away by the shot meant for the schooner.

At this Tom Bend, the Cape Cod man, thrusting both hands in his pockets, and silently laughing, leaned so far back that his sharp chin pointed up to the north star.

Meanwhile on went the schooner, tearing up the water with her long, sword-fish bow.

"Now, then, keep off!" said Wand to the helmsman.

He was obeyed, and in a few minutes the schooner had left her two enemies astern, the wrangling voices of their commanders ringing upon the ears of her crew.

The captain kept straight on for New Orleans.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but won't they be after us now?" suggested his lieutenant.

"I don't think so!"

"I would suggest an excellent trick, sir; that we now keep off a short distance, then stand along upon the course the frigate was pursuing, while in chase of us. Her commander will not suspect this. He will naturally suppose that we are running from him on our present course."

"There you are mistaken, sir!" answered Wand. "Both the frigate's and the cutter's captains will at once conclude that we attempted the very *ruse* you suggest, and will stand along for some time in that direction. Therefore, to keep on as we are is the best plan."

As the wind was dead ahead, it was dark before the schooner ran abreast of the ridge to the right of Clare's mansion.

For a couple of hours she lay off and on, with good look-outs posted, to make sure the coast was clear.

Owing to the darkness, Wand did not see Watson's vessel, stealing into the harbor with all her lights concealed.

In a word, the latter, after explanations had ensued between him and the frigate's commander, had stood along for an hour, as he supposed, in the wake of the schooner. As his vessel needed repairing, after her late injuries, he then veered ship and ran for New Orleans. Thinking, meanwhile, that the schooner might also be standing upon the same course, he took the precaution to show no lantern as he ran into the harbor.

The moment the vessel's anchor was dropped, he lowered a boat, and pulled along the coast to see if there was any sign of the fugitive.

He had not gone far, when he beheld the outlines of the vessel, looming through the gloom, and saw a boat leave her and steal along in the direction of the landing back of Mr. Clare's mansion.

He had his own boat directed beneath the shadow of a rock, whence he could, unobserved, see the other.

It is hardly necessary to add that Wand was in the watched boat, on his way to visit Mary. His crew consisted of four men, Tom Bend among the number.

The Cape Cod man pulled an excellent oar; so vigorous, in

fact, were his strokes that he was obliged to slacken, now and then, so as not to "pull his shipmates round." Through the darkness the light blue eyes of this man, gleaming like the ringed orbs of a wild-cat, were ever turned toward the face of the young captain, whom he seemed to watch with singular intentness.

When the boat struck the beach, Wand left his four men in charge of it, telling his boatswain to sound his whistle in case of a surprise.

The moment the captain was gone, Tom Bend solicited permission to go on what he called a "reconsidering" expedition along the coast. The boatswain consented, ordering him, however, to be back in half an hour.

Bend promising obedience departed. He moved along through the darkness some distance without seeing any thing to excite his suspicions—Watson and his men having just landed *above* the other boat, which they had passed with muffled oars too far off to be discovered.

Bend then changed his "course," stealing along toward the mansion, which Wand had entered a quarter of an hour before.

CHAPTER V.

TRACKING.

"YES," repeated Watson, as Mary Clare and her father looked aghast at each other, on hearing his dreadful announcement, "Henry Wand is the captain of the blue clipper; let him deny it if he can!"

Meanwhile the speaker and his companions had drawn their swords.

"Back!" exclaimed Wand, bracing himself against the wall, "the first who attempts to molest me falls!"

"Hold, Mr. Wand!" exclaimed Clare; "if this accusation be true, you had better surrender, at once!"

Mary, with a low cry, threw herself between her lover and the officers, a hand upon each shoulder of the young man.

Mr. Clare drew her away.

"Nay, my child," he exclaimed, "Wand does not deny the accusation. He has forfeited all claim to your hand by the horrible treachery he has practiced. Surely you would not wish to continue on terms with such a person."

"Hold, papa! there must be some mistake! I conjure you!" she added to the officers, "to leave him, at present. He will probably explain, afterwards."

"My dear young lady," said Watson, bowing, "my duty compels me to arrest him. There can be no mistake. He left the blue clipper, which now lies off and on the ridge to the right of this house."

The speaker had not concluded when Wand, springing to the open sash of the window, overlooking the balcony, darted out.

Watson and his companions darted after him, overtaking him just as he was on the point of descending by means of one of the pillars. Ere they could seize him, he struck the captain a violent blow on the head with the butt of his revolver, and hurled his lieutenant, as he made a blow at him with his sword, to one side.

The other officer, who had lifted his cutlass, was about dealing the fugitive a blow from which he would have never recovered, when suddenly a sinewy figure, which had mounted to the balcony by one of the pillars at the other end of it, came rushing to the spot.

"Jist in time, blast 'em!" exclaimed this worthy, who was none other than Tom Bend; "how d'ye like my chin?"

As he spoke he ran his sharp chin against the head of the officer, with the force of a battering-ram, pushing against him, at the same time, and sending him headlong across the rail of the balcony to the ground below—a distance of twenty feet.

By this time the first lieutenant, who had been hurled aside by Wand, was ready to renew the combat.

His sword describing a circle through the air, must have nearly taken off Bend's head, but for his captain, who, still, for some reason or other, not seeming to wish to discharge his pistol, struck the officer on the head with the butt of it, thus laying him senseless by the side of the half-stunned Watson, who had not yet regained his feet.

Now, however, up he sprung, dashing at Ward so suddenly that the young man was taken unawares.

In fact, the captain's sword must have passed through his body, but for the prompt action of Bend.

"So you want some chin, too, do ye?" exclaimed the Cape Cod man, and drove the pointed member straight into Watson's eye.

The captain staggered, and as he did so, was knocked senseless by a blow from Bend's fist.

Quick as a wild-cat, the sailor then descended the balcony pillar to the ground, where he was joined by Wand.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Cape Cod man, saluting his commander, "for going first; but the fact is, do you see, I was afraid you would stop to tell me to go before you, in which case I should sartinly have insisted on your goin', and then we'd have lost time."

"It's all right, Bend; no excuses; you've done well."

"Which was all owin' to the chin, sir," said Bend, as the twain darted off toward the spot where they had left the boat.

Thinking that the men in charge of it might have been attacked, Wand approached the spot cautiously. He found the men and the boat in their places.

Watson had probably wished to delay the attack in this quarter, until he should have succeeded in capturing the captain.

"Give way!" cried Wand, as he sprung into the boat.

The occupants were soon aboard the schooner, which a moment later went bowling seaward.

"It is all over," muttered the young captain, as he descended into the cabin and bowed his face upon his hands. "What I feared has happened, and *she* will probably be persuaded to marry Watson."

Occasionally, in great agitation, he would rise and pace the cabin, hurriedly.

"Ay," he muttered, "I may no longer hope to win Mary Clare. She, herself, even if she had no father to persuade her, would not probably marry a smuggler."

He went on deck, and there continued pacing to and fro.

All that night and the next day the schooner was headed south-west. In the afternoon a sail was sighted ahead.

It proved to be a small brig, bound south. Wand hailed her, to be informed that the brig was the Petrel, from New Orleans. He invited the captain aboard.

"No, thank you," answered the latter, his eyes twinkling "I have heard of you, and would not care to associate."

The Cape Cod man, leaning across the schooner's rail, grinned as he glanced at the brig's quarter.

Then he glided aft.

"Beg pardon, capt'in, but that ere chap is no saint."

"What do you mean?"

"An honest craft, generally, ain't got TWO NAMES—I'll bet my chin on that."

As he spoke, he looked straight at the brig's quarter, upon which, protruding just above the name Petrel, were the edges of the other letters, showing that the skipper was in the habit of sailing under two names.

"Ahoy, there," shouted Wand, "who christened your craft?"

"Ay, ay, who *christianed* her?" repeated Tom Bend, thrusting his chin over the rail, so that it pointed straight at the captain of the brig.

The skipper colored, glanced over his quarter; then laughed and winked.

"We understand each other," he shouted to Wand. "Success to the blue clipper."

He lowered a boat, and coming aboard, he and the other were soon in earnest conversation.

"Why were you reluctant to let me know your character?" inquired the young man.

"It's my rule," answered the other, "never when I can help it, to let even those in my trade know what I am. It prevents notoriety. I marvel that you, who are also in our line, should have made yourself so conspicuous. Your blue clipper will be the mark for all the sharks in the navy."

Wand smiled.

"It is because I snap my fingers at all of them," he replied, his eyes flashing daring. "Besides, the little DOLPHIN, which, if you look closely at my clipper's stern, you will see is the name painted thereon in white colors, can outsail all their smaller crafts. As to the frigates, I have to maneuver when they are after me."

"You have not yet been admitted to our league?"

"No."

"It is an excellent thing. Your profits would be greatly increased by joining it. But you have not been long in the business yet."

"Not quite a year."

"Two years is the rule, as I suppose you know?"

"Yes, Captain Malo informed me that I would have to work on my own account for two years, ere I could be admitted to the League of the Silver Cask, which, I believe, is the name it goes by?"

"Yes, Malo is at the head. A smart man, and a cunning one, too. His rendezvous is where one would least suspect. Were it discovered, and the smuggler's ledger-book, which is there, and obtained by the 'sharks,' there would be an end of our work, as they contain the names of all the members of the League, with their different hiding-places."

"So I have heard. *You* know where this rendezvous is?"

"Ay, ay; but I would die sooner than reveal it to one who was not a member of the League."

"You perceive that I am a candidate for it," said Wand, procuring his jacket from the rail, upon which it hung inside the companion-way, and showing the silver cask worked upon the shoulder.

"Ay ay. I hope to see you a member at the right time."

"Thank you."

The two captains now separated. A minute after the two vessels were pursuing nearly opposite courses.

Wand kept on until only the brig's masts could be seen above the sea, when he suddenly veered round.

"Do you see that fellow's spars?" he said, to the helmsman.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Well, *keep the schooner on a bee-line for them.*"

"Ay, ay, sir."

He then conversed in a low voice with his first officer, after which he went below.

The crew wondered why he should follow the brig.

"It's all plain enough, don't ye see?" exclaimed Tom Bend, "he's afraid that brig's captain is a double-faced chap, and will tell tales on us."

The schooner was kept after the brig, until night hid her masts from sight. Then Wand clapped on sail, until he was near enough to distinguish her light, keeping his own, meanwhile, concealed. He then shortened sail again so as to hold his present distance from the vessel he was following.

Thus he continued on until near dawn, when he allowed himself to fall so far astern, that, owing to the blue color of his vessel, and a light mist prevailing, the schooner could not have been seen from the brig.

Before night the latter vessel was observed to anchor off that part of the coast about sixty miles from Vera Cruz.

Wand now laid off and on, still keeping out of sight of the other craft.

At dark he had his boat lowered, and pulled ashore, about four miles from the spot where the brig was anchored.

Taking with him a couple of trusty men, Tom Bend one of the number, armed with revolver and cutlass, he moved swiftly along the shore, until he had gained a rock opposite the spot where the brig lay anchored, and behind which he screened himself and his men.

A few minutes after a boat was lowered from the brig, containing the captain and one man.

It was seen by the light of the moon shining at the time, to glide toward the line of conical rocks, which have been mentioned, and among which it soon after disappeared.

"We must follow those fellows," said Wand to Tom Bend, "to do which we'll have to wade and swim in search of them."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered Bend. "I can swim like a cod-fish. My chin will sarve a good turn if we git entangled in seaweed. I can cut that in two with it, and clear the way."

Having ordered the other man to remain, and giving him a whistle to sound as an alarm in case of his seeing any party approaching, Wand now divesting himself of his shoes and jacket, entered the water with his companion.

"Which way, sir?" inquired Bend, as each of the men tied his cutlass and his revolver to his back, to prevent their getting wet.

"Straight ahead."

Silently and swiftly the two then swam in the required

direction, which took them to the base of one of the conical peaks.

"Look sharp, Bend," whispered Wand; "d'ye see any thing?"

The man answered in the negative. Suddenly the light dip of paddles was heard.

"There they are," whispered Bend, pointing at the boat, which had left the brig, and was now seen slowly pursuing its way among the rocky labyrinths.

Finally it was seen to strike the base of one of the peaks, which its occupants now commenced ascending.

"Now, then," said Wand, the moment the brig's men were screened by a projecting rock, "now is our time. We must follow them."

Both struck out, and swimming and wading a distance of twenty yards, had nearly reached the base of the cliff, when, as they moved toward the beach, their legs were suddenly caught in what seemed to be a network of ropes cunningly laid under water!

While vainly endeavoring to extricate themselves, they heard the whistle of the man they had left behind them sounding an alarm!

CHAPTER VI

THE LOST GIRL.

THE scene upon the balcony of Clare's mansion between Wand, Tom Bend and the officers of the Roland had been partially witnessed by Mr. Clare and his daughter, the light from the room affording them an indistinct view.

Mr. Clare had held on firmly to his daughter, who still showed the utmost anxiety on her lover's account, and seemed anxious to interfere to prevent his being hurt.

Finally Captain Watson, recovering from the effects of the blows he had received, opened his eyes to see Mr. Clare bending over him. Mary was nowhere in sight; she had gone to

her room, there to indulge alone the new sorrow which had come upon her.

"Have they escaped?" cried Watson, springing to his feet.

Mr. Clare said he believed they had, at which Watson, grinding his teeth, said he would yet be even with "that rascal."

"Unfortunately," he added, "my vessel needs repairing, so that I can not go at once."

Mr. Clare seemed to consider a moment.

"I have an idea," said he, "that sea-air would do Mary good—would distract her from her thoughts of that young smuggler. Will you take us aboard as your passengers, during the chase?"

"Most willingly," answered the delighted captain. "Meanwhile, may I ask you to trouble yourself for some kind of plaster? There was a sort of wild barbarian Sampson with that fellow who nearly bunged out my eye with an ass' jaw-bone!"

The plaster having been procured for his eye, the captain departed.

A week later his vessel was bowling out of the harbor, bearing aboard both Mary Clare and her father. It was only the fact that Watson was about starting in pursuit of her lover's vessel that had induced the young girl to comply with her parent's request to take passage aboard his enemy's craft. With the feverish anxiety a woman feels for a beloved object, Mary longed to be near Wand throughout his troubles.

While shocked and grieved at the strange course he had taken, she had again and again endeavored to find excuses for him. Could she but see him alone for a couple of hours, she doubted not that she could persuade him to give up the lawless life he had chosen.

When she said this to Mr. Clare, however, he shrugged his shoulders, and sadly answered that Wand could be hung, if arrested, for thus proving a traitor to the Government.

Mary's cheek again lost its color; her eyes looked very sad, and ever seemed, now, to bear the traces of weeping.

Vainly Watson endeavored to ~~swindle~~ ^{swindle} her—to assure her—joking about his bunged eye and other matters. The girl would stand, day after day, looking far away toward the

clouds upon the distant horizon, and wondering if Wand's vessel was among them—wondering what her lover was now doing, and, above all, *hoping that he would not be captured.*

The vessel steering south-west had kept on for three days without a sign of the blue clipper being seen, when, on the evening of the fourth day, a number of lights, like lanterns, were observed, moving hither and thither through the long grass ashore, growing near the beach, about two miles above Vera Cruz.

Watson did not seem to particularly notice the lights; but Mr. Clare had watched them narrowly from the first.

"They are nothing but will-o'-the-wisps," answered the captain, to a query from the merchant; "we may as well keep along on our course."

"I think you are mistaken," replied Clare; "I am sure I see the faint outlines of human figures."

"Do you? Oh, well, I shouldn't be surprised if they are Indian fishermen."

The old gentleman went below, procuring his night-glass, after looking through which he exclaimed:

"There are casks; I see casks ashore, there, in the long grass; and there, also, near the beach, is a large boat like a flat-boat. Captain, those men are smugglers."

Now Watson seemed to show considerable interest. The night-glass revealed to him also the casks and the boat.

"Back the main yard and clear away my quarter-boat," he ordered.

He was obeyed; the boat was lowered and manned by men armed with cutlasses and pistols. The cutter's lights were then extinguished.

Mr. Clare requested permission to go with the captain. The latter hesitated at first; but Clare almost insisting, he was permitted to go.

"I must go, too—oh, papa!" said a sad voice; and looking up, the boat's crew beheld Mary at the rail.

"As there may be a combat," said Watson, in a low voice, to Mr. Clare, "your child had better remain where she is."

So Clare thus urged; but she was resolute. Feeling almost sure that her lover was involved with those smugglers ashore, she was anxious to go, and insisted upon it.

Masculine gallantry would not permit the seaman to hold out longer. A comfortable seat was made for Mary, and more men ordered into the boat to act as a guard and take care of her, in case of an affray.

With muffled oars the craft was then directed shoreward.

As she drew near the beach, the forms, and even the faces of the men ashore were faintly seen by the light of their lanterns.

Some of them were attired in dark pants, jackets and sou'westers; others wore Guernsey frocks, and had heavy sea-boots reaching above their knees.

In the stern-sheets watching them, Watson suddenly was attacked with a violent fit of coughing.

"Confound it," he exclaimed, "the fellows will hear me!"

They did hear him. More than one man carrying a lantern was seen hurrying toward the beach. The sounds of voices, with the noise made by the rolling of casks, suddenly stopped. The lanterns were also extinguished; a dark line, as of the outlines of men gathering to resist an attack, was seen along the beach.

"There are many of them, as nearly as I can judge," said Watson; "we had better return aboard for more hands."

"I am surprised to hear you, sir," remarked Clare; "don't you see that the rascals will escape?"

"Ay, true enough. We will go ashore," and he was again seized with that violent fit of coughing.

Just then there was a wild, fierce shout; the crack of fire-arms was heard, several bullets passed over the heads of the crew.

"Pull, men, pull lively!" screamed Watson.

"The boat is sinking," said his coxswain. "Some of the bullets have ripped her planking."

"That can not be."

As the captain spoke, Mr. Clare detected something which surprised him; a pair of arms, raised up from the water right in front of his face, which was turned sideways.

Ere he could speak, he was seized by the collar and dragged over into the sea.

Over went the boat, at the same moment; the struggling crew finding themselves surrounded by about fifty stalwart

swimmers, who at once made an attack upon them with heavy staves, striking them on the head with one hand, while with the other supporting themselves upon the water. In a word, it was evident that these men had stoven and overturned the boat, thus at once depriving their adversaries of the power of using the firearms they had brought with them.

Several of the unfortunates, unable to swim, went down with gurgling cries; the rest, vainly endeavoring to wield their cutlasses, were either beaten senseless on the head, suffering the fate of their drowned companions, or, swimming away, were, with fierce growls, pursued by their foes.

Nearly half of the crew of thirty men were lost; the remnant effected a landing on a rock, some distance below the spot where the smugglers had been seen.

As to Watson, a huge fellow had lifted a club to beat out his brains, when the captain said something to him in a low voice.

Instantly the man, throwing away his club, swam with his captive to the beach.

Meanwhile, what has become of Mary Clare and her father?

When the boat was overturned, the girl's shriek had been heard ringing out an instant.

As to Mr. Clare, beaten nearly senseless, he had contrived, by swimming under water, to elude his assailant in the darkness. Seizing an oar, he pushed it further out to sea, and cold, shivering, full of fears on his child's account, he clung to it until at length he was picked up by a boat which the lieutenant, suspecting foul play, had sent out, the crew provided with plenty of lanterns and well armed.

The boat having picked up Mr. Clare, was directed ashore, where the captain was found lying, apparently much hurt.

To the inquiries of the boat's officer, he replied that he had been dragged ashore and badly beaten, but not seriously, he hoped, the smuggler having hurriedly made off, fearing that the cutter's people would take the alarm, and come pouncing upon them.

"I don't see how they knew the cutter was near," said the lieutenant, "as we showed no lights."

"They are sharp. I doubt not that while we were stand-

ing along, some fellow was out in a skiff spying upon us. The rascals swim like fish, and have made bad work with my men! How many have you picked up?"

"Not one as yet; but here is Mr. Clare,"—stating how he found him.

"Have you seen any thing of my daughter?" Clare anxiously inquired.

"No, sir. Good God, has she not yet been found?"

"No," groaned Clare, "my poor child must have been drowned."

"She may have been brought ashore," suggested the lieutenant; "let us examine the ground. It is soft, and we may discover her tracks."

A keen search was instituted, but no sign of the girl could be found. Mr. Clare's heart sunk within him. He now felt almost sure she had been drowned.

"I did not want her to go," said Watson. "I feared harm would befall her."

Poor Clare did not answer. He had snatched a lantern, and was running hither and thither, searching vainly for his lost child.

Among the casks scattered in profusion on every hand, he continued his search, until Watson came limping to his side.

"Little use, I'm afraid, looking for her, here, sir. We will take to the boat, and see if—if—"

"I understand," groaned Clare—"if we can find her body."

He entered the boat, which was pulled vainly in all direction.

"How about those casks?" inquired his lieutenant, when they were aboard, and Clare had gone below to indulge his deep grief in solitude.

"Casks? Oh!" said Watson. "I had not thought of them. I was so worried about Miss Clare! Pray do not bring up such a subject at such a time."

"I feel as badly as you, sir, I dare say; but our calling requires—"

"Oh, never mind. We will think about the casks in the morning."

At dawn, that portion of the overturned boat's crew, who had escaped to the rock, were there seen from the cutter.

It was also noticed that not a cask was remaining ! Both these and the flat-boat, which had been lying near the beach, had vanished.

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it !" cried Watson ; " those chaps must have come back, after we were gone, and have carried off their casks, in the dark."

The men on the rock were picked up. They averred that they had indistinctly seen the flat-boat go by, loaded with its freight of casks during the night.

No signs yet of missing Mary Clare !

CHAPTER VII.

PRISONERS.

WAND and his companion struggled until they were out of breath to free themselves from the entangling under-water net.

Meanwhile the whistle continued sounding.

Suddenly it stopped.

Then followed the rapid strokes of oars, and, glancing behind, the two beheld a large boat, full of men, pulling toward them.

"My chin can do no good ag'in' such overpowerin' numbers !" remarked Tom Bend, smoothing the member, as if trying to make it yet sharper, with his hand.

"We might, perhaps, free ourselves from these coils with a knife," said Wand.

"Ay, but d'ye see, sir, the man that dove under water to do that would be like to git his head entangled, which would be worse than the feet."

"True ; however, I am determined to try it."

So saying he pulled his knife from his belt and ducked his head under.

"I'm determined to follow suit, bet my chin on that !"

Down he went.

Meanwhile Wand began cutting the network. Unfortun-

ately he got his arm entangled, so that he could no longer use the knife. While endeavoring to extricate the arm, his other one also became entangled. He was now unable to lift his head out of water to breathe.

He felt himself suffocating—his situation was fearful!

Suddenly something dark clove the waters before him. He lifted his head, as his arms were freed, out of the water, to see his companion's face covered with the network.

He soon freed him from his uncomfortable situation, to learn that he owed his preservation to Tom Bend, who, with his chin, had hooked the network, first hauling thus upon it, and then severing it with his knife.

Meanwhile the boat had now approached within twenty fathoms of the two men.

"They sartinly haven't seen us, yet," said Bend, as he turned his head far down, sideways.

"Why do you do that?"

Bend pointed to a long-peaked shadow, projecting upon the water.

"I'm tryin' to hide my chin, which, *unfortunately*, throws a long shaddy," answered Bend.

"This way," said Wand, crawling out of the water.

Bend followed. The young man screened himself behind a projecting spur of rock. They had been sufficiently in shadow not to be yet noticed.

On came the boat. It struck the very rock up which the two men had clambered. Lanterns were then lighted, revealing the dark faces of about thirty stout seamen, attired in Guernsey frocks, blue pants and Scotch caps and sou'westers.

"Now, lads!" said the leader, whom Wand recognized as Captain Malo, "follow me. We've made a good cruise, and will to our cave to celebrate it with a few bumpers!"

The remark was greeted with applause.

"I dare say yonder fellow," pointing toward the brig, "brings good news to us, also. I know her by those two red lights; she is the Petrel."

In single file the men now proceeded to mount the cliff.

Wand, whispering Bend to follow, emerged from his hiding-place, and moved after them.

Unfortunately, the Cape Cod man, impelled by curiosity

thrust his neck a little too far above the wall of rock behind which they were creeping.

One of the party at that moment turned round. Bend dodged out of sight, but the man had, or fancied he had, seen somebody, as was evinced by his manner. He had halted, and stood looking in the direction of the rocky wall.

"Bad!" muttered Wand. "We can not make an assault upon the fellow for fear of alarming the others. Here he comes." Bend, at this time, was about ten feet from his captain, in a hollow of the rocks, and near the side of the cliff, which, at this point, was perpendicular and dangerous.

The young captain, who was watching him, saw him suddenly fall, *apparently headlong from his position!*

A moment later, along came the man, peering into the hollow, when, not seeing any person—Wand being screened behind a rock—he rejoined his companions, evidently believing that his imagination had deceived him.

Anxious on Bend's account, Wand now crawled to the edge of the cliff and peered down.

For some moments he could see nothing but the masses of thick vines, swaying against the rocky side.

Suddenly, however, thrust out from the thick mass, a foot below him, the young man beheld the face of Bend.

"A cute trick, sir. I jist flopped myself head over heels, swingin' by one of these ere vines, into the shrubberum."

"Well done, Bend," whispered Wand; "but come, let us lose no time. Those fellows are already twenty yards above us."

Bend soon clambered to his captain's side.

In a minute the two men were close upon them, still, however, carefully screened by a projecting rock.

The smugglers had now reached the opening in the top of the cliff, through which they descended, one by one.

In about ten minutes after the last man had vanished, Wand crept forward and peered into the opening. All was darkness, but, thrusting down a hand, he discovered that the rope was still left hanging.

"I'll go first," he whispered to Bend; "you had, perhaps, better remain here."

"Beg pardin, sir; but I differ. I may be of sarvice, if I go with ye."

"Very well. Follow me, then."

So saying, he swung himself into the opening, by means of the rope, and cautiously descending, when he was suddenly startled by a hoarse voice below, hailing him in Spanish, which he understood.

"Ahoy, there, who's that?"

For an instant Wand remained motionless, hardly knowing what reply to make. To gain time, he answered, disguising his voice:

"It is *I*!"

"Captain Wilkins?"

"Ay, ay—and who are you?"

"Captain Malo's mate, Boker."

"Won't you go and tell the captain to come here?"

The sound of receding footsteps was heard below.

"Now, Bend, quick as lightning," whispered Wand; "down we go."

Down he went, followed by Bend. They groped along, side by side. Suddenly the rays of a lantern, in the distance, coming from the direction of the descending passage-way, were seen, partially lighting the gloom, revealing to the two men several rocky recesses.

Into one of these darted the young captain, his companion keeping at his side. Soon along came Captain Malo, holding a large lantern. He glanced all round him, after scrutinizing the rope.

"Very strange," he muttered, "what can have become of him."

He was about going back to his mate, to ascertain the meaning of this strange affair, when Wand emerged from the recess.

Malo, holding up the lantern, recognized him.

"Hallo! hallo! What means this? How came *you* here?"

"I came by that rope," answered Wand, coolly.

"Which here's hopin' it may never be twisted round your neck," said Tom Bend, addressing Malo.

"Who's this fellow?" said Malo, scowling.

"He won't hurt you. One of my men."

"How, in the name of perdition, did you find my rendez-

vous, and how came you to be mistaken for Captain Wilkins—an old friend of mine.”

“To your first question I answer, I followed you and your party—to the last, I suppose it was the darkness.”

“And why did you follow me?” said Malo, fiercely; “who gave you permission?”

“I am anxious to become a member of the League of the Silver Cask,” said Wand; “that was my reason. I know I have not been in the business two years, but I think you will admit me, when I tell you that, the moment you do, I will reward you with the services of my blue clipper.”

Malo seemed to reflect.

“And this fellow,” said the smuggler captain, surveying Bend, “I don’t exactly like his looks.”

“How d’ye like my chi?” inquired the Cape Cod man, thrusting the member almost into the other’s eyes.

“Don’t like it, at all. It’s a reg’lar Yankee chin—sharp and inquisitive.”

“You’ll find it’ll do you good sarvice,” said Bend.

Malo now drew Wand aside.

The two conversed in a low voice for several moments, the smuggler chief consenting to take Wand and his companion into his League.

They were conducted into the main apartment, containing the whole band.

“This way,” said Malo, as the rough fellows started up glaring like wild beasts at the twain. “Here, my men, are two more members for our League.”

The band, drawing their cutlasses, gathered round the new comers.

From a desk in one corner, Malo then produced a ledger book, the cover of which was painted red.

The two men were ordered to put their names down beneath a long list of others.

Wand wrote his with a steady hand. Bend drew back stroking his chin.

“Your turn!” said Malo.

“Am perfectly unacquainted with pens,” answered the Cape Cod man.

He was then told to make a cross. Even this task he

performed awkwardly; the cross looking like two pot-hooks falling against each other.

"You have witnessed," said Malo, to his band.

"Ay, ay," was answered.

"What is the cost of treason?"

"The traitor to be starved to death and his body thrown to the fishes!"

"Ay, ay, now!" cried Bend, "don't talk about starvin' to death, but jist give us some smuggled rum and *biskits*, as we're both blasted hungry."

"Silence!" roared Malo. "Now, men, prove the new members!"

At this a dozen of the fiercest looking fellows advanced upon the two men, raising their cutlasses above them, as if to cut them down, their eyes, in a concentrated focus of light, seeming to pierce them through.

Wand returned their glances calmly; as to Bend, he leaned back so far, laughing silently, that little more than his sharp chin, pointing up at the ceiling, was visible.

"That will do," said Malo, satisfied with the manner in which the twain withstood the ordeal. "After three days, you will be at liberty to leave."

Wand bowed acquiescence.

"And now for somethin' to eat!" cried Bend, "that we may be sartin we are not to be starved to death."

Upon a pine table in the apartment some meat and biscuits were laid for the new-comers, who, having an excellent appetite, after their late adventures, did full justice to the meal.

On the next night the masked man, Wilkins, entered the cave. He started, on seeing Wand; then drew Malo aside and conversed with him in a low voice.

Bend, who, at this time, was seated out of the visitor's sight, in an angle of the rocky apartment, watched the man, apparently with much interest.

When he was gone, Malo said something to half a dozen of his men.

They closed round Wand and Bend, and conducted them to a small apartment like a cell, locking the door upon them. "What means this?" Wand had inquired. "Don't know," had been the rough answer—the only one vouchsafed.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE RENDEZVOUS.

THE moment the cutter's boat was overturned, Mary felt herself going down under water. She threw up her arms. As she did so she felt her hand grasped. Nearly suffocated by her submersion, she was now unable to cry out. By the faint light she saw a rough, bearded face; then felt herself clasped round the waist, and drawn along through the water by an expert swimmer.

When they reached land she was enabled, by the light of a half-extinguished lantern on the ground, to make out the person who had saved her from drowning. He was short, broad-shouldered, with a low forehead and sunken eyes—a forbidding-looking person.

"Papa! Oh, where is papa?" cried the young girl, glancing anxiously round her; "has he not been saved, too?"

"I'm afraid not," answered the man, roughly; "who is your father?"

She told his name.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps some more may be saved in a little while; or at least brought here, prisoners!"

By the noise she now heard out in the water, Mary realized that the boat's party had been attacked, a fact which she, in her confusion, had not hitherto known, thinking that the man who had saved her was one of the cutter's crew; that he had come off in a boat sent from that vessel by the lieutenant.

She turned to leave the spot, but her companion confronted her.

"Not so fast, miss. The captain may have something to say to you."

The sound of persons wading shoreward soon was heard.

Watson was conducted to the beach by three men, among them the smuggler, captain Malo.

The young girl, who had been released by her companion, now hurried toward the captain.

"You hear, Miss Clare?" he exclaimed. "Alas, and I can do nothing for you, as I am a prisoner."

"Papa—have you seen him?" Mary anxiously inquired.

He answered no. A moment later he was led away, out of sight in the darkness.

Soon after captain Malo, with a couple of men, confronted Mary.

"You must go with us," said he.

She shuddered; a thrill of terror went through her.

"Go where?"

"Never mind that. You will find out, in good time."

So saying, he caught her by the arm, and, in spite of her pleadings to be permitted to walk alone, he maintained his hold. Mary mustered all her resolution and fortitude; but what could be expected of a poor girl in her situation—crouched through and through, fatigued and terrified. Completely broken down, sobs and tears escaped her.

"You need not be afraid," said Malo, roughly, "we mean no great harm."

They had walked about a mile, when they came to a large wagon, with a team of mules.

This Mary was made to enter. Her conductors followed, and away went the wagon, the wheels keeping up a dismal creaking.

Finally the vehicle was stopped near the beach, where a boat lay in waiting.

Into this boat Mary was conducted, her companions getting in after her, and taking oars.

A few pulls carried them to a low-hulled schooner, lying about a quarter of a mile from the beach.

Aboard this vessel and down into the cabin, Mary was then led.

She was made to enter a small, neatly-furnished apartment, in which sat a young girl, apparently about her own age. She was a handsome brunette, with large, dark eyes, and hair of the same color flowing down her shoulders.

"Nettie," said Malo, "here is a companion for you. Keep your eyes on her."

"Ay, ay, father; I won't let her escape me," answered the brunette.

Her manner was masculine ; her black eyes flashed and twinkled, as she spoke. Mary shrunk, repelled by her.

"Come, none of that," said Nettie, "but sit down here," pointing to a chair, "and behave yourself."

"You speak to me as if I was a child," said Mary, laughing. "Pray, what means this impertinence ; and why, oh, why am I brought here ?" and tears flowed from the brown eyes.

"I will soon find out for you," answered Nettie, "as I like to oblige my prisoners. Do you know," she added, "I have had worse ones to deal with than you ?"

Mary paid little attention to her words, perceiving which the brunette walked out with a flaunting air, which was also lost upon the other.

Soon she returned. She had ascertained from her father why Miss Clare had been brought here. Her parent had found out that Mary was the daughter of the merchant, Herbert Clare—a man who, by pecuniary aid and other means, had done all in his power to help such parties as had been sent out in quest of smugglers. It was a mere desire of revenge, therefore, that had prompted the captain to carry the girl to this retreat. Mary doubted such a story. Some *other* motive must have induced the man to convey her here.

In a short time Mary made herself more comfortable by a change of attire provided by Nettie.

"There is something on your mind," said the latter, "besides your sorrow at being confined here."

Just then there was a tap at the door. Nettie opened it, when a tall, brown fellow presented her with a beautiful pair of velvet slippers.

"That is Mr. Boker, father's mate," said Nettie, after she had accepted the slippers, and rather unceremoniously shut the door in his face ; "he is ever pestering me with presents. I don't like him, at all."

As she spoke, she tried on the slippers with a satisfied air, remarking that they would do very well for smuggled goods.

Mary paid little attention to what was going on. Seated in a corner, she mused sadly upon late events.

Meanwhile the swashing of water round the schooner proclaimed that she was under way.

A few hours passed, when Mary was conducted to a boat

alongside. The schooner now was lying concealed in a bay behind the conical shaped rocks among which was the smugglers' rendezvous.

Soon the boat was pulled to the base of the peak, in the very bosom of which was Malo's retreat.

To the latter the young girl was finally led, her descent being accomplished by means of a rope-ladder.

"Come with me," said Nettie, taking the fair prisoner's arm, and leading her to a small, neatly-furnished apartment at one side of the passage-way, leading to the main room, "and I will show you my other prisoners.

So saying she mounted a chair, and lifting a rough sea-picture hanging upon the wall, disclosed an opening, through which gushed a stream of lurid light.

A feeling of curiosity for which she could hardly account, tempted Mary to look through the aperture, when she beheld a sight that thrilled her with pity; two wasted forms, lying upon a bed of coarse straw. As she still gazed, the eyes of one of these men were uplifted, when, in the lineaments of the face she recognized *Henry Wand*.

He knew her, too, for the light of the lamp shed a bright glare upon all objects. A wild cry escaped him; he sprung up like a shot, his hand clutching one of the bars, his burning eyes glaring upon her.

"Mary," he gasped, "what are *you* doing here?"

"Back!" gritted Nettie, through her teeth, her eyes glaring like a tiger's upon the girl. "So you know him!"

And she pushed the young lady so violently off the chair, that she came near spraining her ankle.

"Yes. Oh, Henry! Henry!"

"Humph! so that's the reason," cried Nettie, jumping down and confronting her, "that's the reason, is it, that he was so sad and thoughtful-like? Now, then," she added, aside, "I am more than ever determined to win him."

The truth was, the handsome person, coupled with the dauntless bravery of Wand, had made a strong impression upon Nettie.

She had vainly endeavored to persuade her father to give the prisoners better fare, and allow them the range of a larger apartment.

Malo, who had again seen Wilkins, Soon after Wand's confinement, had, evidently from something the masked visitor had said to him, become more harsh than before in his treatment of the two men.

This puzzled Wand, who was unable to divine his intentions.

Meanwhile Malo wondered how it was that the young man stood this deprivation of food so well. Stronger men than he, the smuggler was sure, would have suffered more ere this, under the circumstances.

The fact was that, unknown to Malo, Wand had a sort of ally in his pretty daughter, Nettie, who, whenever opportunity offered, would contrive to slip a little extra food into the prisoner's hand.

This food would have kept him in a better state than he was, but for his always insisting on sharing it with Bend.

CHAPTER IX.

SHOT !

NETTIE replaced the picture over the opening in the wall.

"Oh, to think that *he* should come to this!" sobbed Mary.

Nettie watched her steadily a moment, then shrugging her shoulders, she walked out of the apartment, locking the door after her.

The next moment Mary heard a noise in the adjoining cell, heard a door open as if the prisoners had been led away.

Mounting the chair and looking through the grating, she discovered that such was the case.

Pity for suffering Wand, made her now lose entire sight of his faults. She could only grieve and writhe with anguish on his account.

Nettie had gone straight to her father, and told him that Mary and Wand had been lovers, that she thought it would therefore be best for the prisoners to be transferred to some other cell.

This was done. They were conducted to an apartment, smaller even than the one they had left, by Malo's mate, Mr. Boker.

Did the latter see any thing in the eyes of Nettie to excite his jealousy, as he led the twain forth?

Certain it is, that he was more than usually severe with them.

He carried a stout staff, with which he struck Bend a blow across the back to quicken his movements. Bend's wrists were both secured with irons. He turned, however, and for an instant looked steadily at Boker, the whites of his eyes fairly seeming to turn green.

"You rascal!" cried Wand; "who gave you orders to strike a bound prisoner?"

Boker showed his teeth. Then, up went his staff, as if he was about to strike the speaker.

He would have done so but for an interruption. Nettie sprung forward and caught his arm, her eyes flashing fire.

"Never again dare to attempt to strike this man!" she said, showing her brilliant teeth.

Boker shrunk back, completely cowed.

That same day a visitor came to the rendezvous. It was the masked man—Wilkins.

He drew Malo aside. For a long time the two conversed in a low tone.

When they separated, and Wilkins left the retreat, Nettie slyly opened the door of the cell where the prisoners had first been confined.

She had heard all that passed between her father and his visitor. Soon after, in the evening, she repaired to the prisoners' cell.

This apartment was another of those convenient hollows, with which the smugglers' retreat abounded. Before his confinement, Wand had ascertained that there were at least ten different apartments in the cliffy rendezvous.

Some previous convulsion of nature had overturned the rocks, and piled them in grotesque masses, with openings leading in and out, forming a number of curious caverns, both large and small. The young man had heard that there was another means of exit from the retreat, besides the rope-

ladder, a narrow passage leading to a small opening, ten feet above the beach. This way, Malo had resolved never to use except in case of an attack, when flight should be necessary. He kept the opening blocked up by a large rock, so thickly overhung with brambles, vines and other shrubbery, that it could not be seen by any person on that side.

A dozen men, however, could dislodge the rock with one hard push.

"Mr. Wand," said Nettie, in a low voice, "I have come to set you free."

"Many thanks," said Wand, joyfully. "I'm sure I shall be glad enough to get away from here."

"A plot has been hatched, by which you are to be made prisoner by naval men. Even now they are waiting for a signal to pounce upon this place and take you."

"And what have naval men to do with smugglers?" inquired Wand, much surprised.

"A certain person named Wilkins," answered Nettie, "is anxious to capture you. I have overheard his conversation with father, by which I have discovered that it was he who induced the captain to put you in confinement. Otherwise you would have been permitted, as was agreed, when you joined the League, to leave this place, three days later. Wilkins, who is a cunning rascal, made a plan with father to keep you here, until he could see the officers of a certain cutter"—here Nettie's eyes gleamed with a peculiar expression—"and, without of course letting them know his connection with our smugglers, lead them to this rendezvous, that they might make an attack upon it, when, of course, you would be captured with the rest."

While she was speaking, Bend had watched her intently, a singularly shrewd expression lighting his face.

"You will free me, too?" said he.

"No," replied Nettie, shrugging her shoulders. "I have nothing to do with you. Besides, the boat in which I am to convey Mr. Wand would not hold three people."

"Humph!" muttered Bend. "I could swim, as to that matter."

The girl looked impatient.

"It would cause delay. There is no time to lose."

"You are going with Captain Wand?"

"None of your business."

"I twig," said Bend, scratching his breast with his chin; "you're in love with the captain! Ha! ha!"

"I am sure you are mistaken," said Wand, in a voice of displeasure. "It is kindness alone that actuates this young woman."

Nettie gave him a grateful glance. Her dark eyes beamed tenderly upon him.

He endeavored to persuade her to free his companion, also, but she would not do so.

Wand then shook hands with Bend.

"I am sorry you are not included, my man," said he.

"Never mind, sir," replied Bend, "my chin will sarve me yet."

"Come," whispered Nettie; "there is no time to lose."

So saying she unfastened the handcuffs upon his wrists with the key which she had obtained from her father's apartment, and led him out of the cell.

The passage-way was dark and deserted. She locked the cell door; then, with her companion, mounted the rope-ladder.

Conducting Wand down the precipice, she bade him enter a small skiff near the strip of beach at its base.

The boat soon was gliding out from the rocky labyrinth toward the sea.

"Where are we going?" inquired Wand, as Nettie vigorously plied the paddles.

"I am going to take you to your clipper," she answered. "I know where it is. It is not a league from here."

"I am glad to hear that!" exclaimed Wand, joyfully.

"Well you may be. You are needed aboard, as there is a revenue cutter between here and Vera Cruz."

"Captain Watson's vessel," muttered Wand.

"Boat ahoy!" came a rough hail, at that moment, from a rock about ten yards to the left.

At the same moment, a number of lanterns flashed, revealing a party of men in the usual naval dress.

"We are discovered!" cried the girl, whirling the skiff

around, "but I know of a cavernous retreat, up in the cliff we quitted, below the rendezvous, where you can conceal yourself without being discovered."

As she spoke, a man, in a lieutenant's uniform, was seen bending far over from one of the rocks—a pistol in his hand.

The glare of the lanterns, meanwhile, fell full upon the person of Nettie's companion.

"It is Captain Wand! Hold, there—I know you!" shouted the lieutenant; "you can not escape us. Stop, or I fire!"

Nettie, however, continued to ply her paddles.

"Down," she whispered to Wand, "crouch down until we get behind that rock, you see ahead."

He was about obeying, when crack! went the pistol, and the young man fell into the bottom of the boat.

"*You have killed him! he is dead!*" screamed Nettie, as the boat glided behind the rock, beyond.

The sound of oars was now heard.

The lieutenant, determined to make sure he had killed his man, was soon in pursuit.

Unacquainted with the rocky labyrinths, he was soon fast in a protruding rift, on a level with the water, from which he was unable, for some time, to extricate the boat.

When, at last, he got it clear, he made a vain search for the skiff and its occupants.

"I couldn't have missed him," remarked the lieutenant to a midshipman. "I'm quite sure my shot did its duty. That woman, whoever she may be, is welcome to the body."

Still, he continued his search, which, however, proved fruitless.

CHAPTER X.

AFLOAT AGAIN.

MARY sat in the same apartment, her face buried in her hands, giving way to her grief.

It was the morning after Wand had been shot. She had not yet heard of the event.

Suddenly there was a terrific noise! The hollow passages of the mountain cave rung with the report of firearms, with the shouts of men, the hasty trampling of feet.

"What can be the matter?"

"Oh, miss!" exclaimed Nettie, suddenly rushing into the room, "our enemies have found us out. The rendezvous is attacked!"

"Thank God! then *he* may be saved!" said Mary.

"You forget that he is a smuggler, too—this Wand of yours—and that a price is set upon his head. The place is attacked by a naval man of war, a cutter, anchored off our coast."

Mary bowed her beautiful head. There seemed no hope for Wand.

Meanwhile the din without was suddenly hushed; all was still.

The door of the apartment opened. Mary drew back, with a cry of surprise, as Captain Watson entered.

"Thank Heaven, you are safe!" he exclaimed. "I have found you at last."

"Oh, Captain Watson! have you seen any thing of my father?"

"Your father is safe—aboard my cutter—half-distracted on your account. We have been searching hard for you, ever since you were missed. We followed up your tracks and those of the smugglers closely—we looked in every nook and corner, in vain. Finally, we reached these cliffs, discovered the rendezvous, and planned this surprise. It pleases me much that it is my good fortune to rescue you."

"You will take me to my father?" cried Mary.

"Certainly."

He conducted her out of the cave.

From the summit of the cliff, she could see the cutter far away, the Stars and Stripes fluttering at her mizzen.

The sight would have cheered her; but for the thought of Captain Wand, who was, she believed, now Watson's prisoner.

Where—where—is HE?" she at length ventured to ask—"Captain Wand?"

An exultant expression momentarily lighted her companion's face. He turned aside to hide it, and, with pretended sadness, answered:

"Have you not heard?"

"No, sir—what?"

"He was shot dead, last night, while attempting to escape!"

Mary staggered back, half-fainting, white with agony.

Watson clenched his teeth at this proof of attachment to Wand.

"Are you sure?" she gasped; "is there not some mistake?"

"I think not, although I have some questions to ask a certain young woman, who was with him at the time, endeavoring to help him get off, as my lieutenant informed me. That woman could have been none other than the one we just left—the smuggler captain's daughter, probably. I have put a guard at the door of her apartment, so that she can not get off until I can ask the question I intend."

He then narrated the particulars of Wand's shooting as has already been told.

Mary's face lighted up.

"There may have been some mistake. He may have only been wounded."

"That is what I wish to find out from the girl."

"Do not let us put it off!" cried Mary; "we will question her at once."

They descended into the cave and questioned Nettie.

She looked at Miss Clare steadily, her eyes flashing strangely.

"You will never see him again."

"He was shot dead, then?" said Watson. "What made you put off with his body after he was shot?"

"Because I did not think he was really dead," said Nettie. "I got ashore and looked at him, however, to perceive that it was all over with him. He expired, soon after. Father's mate came along, just then, and together we dropped the body into the sea!"

"Dead! dead!" wailed Mary.

"Nay," said Watson; "he is better off than he would have been, had he been captured, as he would, in that case, have been tried and disgraced by a court-martial, before being executed."

Vainly the captain endeavored to soothe her.

Her eyes became wilder; she fell fainting in Nettie's arms.

When she recovered, there was a change in her situation. She lay on a soft couch, her father kneeling by her side.

"Where am I?"

"Safe, my darling, aboard Captain Watson's cutter. Thank God! you are found, at last. That rascally smuggler captain was evidently waiting until a large reward should be offered for you, when he would have found some means to have you restored to my arms, and to obtain his money without getting himself in trouble. Every thing has come out nearly right. Even the blue clipper is now in sight, and our captain's lieutenant is in pursuit."

"And where is HE?" inquired Mary, as she vainly endeavored to remember what had happened.

"Oh, yes! No wonder you ask for him. I have promised you to him, for he is a noble young man. Since you were lost, he has not not been able to rest, night or day. He asked me, if *he* found you and restored you to my arms, would I consent to his making you his wife? Of course, as I always thought you seemed to like him, I answered yes; that was, provided *you* too would agree. Let me persuade you, my child, to listen to him, and—"

"Of whom do you speak, papa?"

"Captain Watson!"

"No—no," she said, shuddering, "it was not him I asked for; it was Henry—Henry!"

Mr. Ciare turned pale.

"Unfortunate young man! You must no longer think of him; but try and dismiss from your mind one who proved a traitor to his Government, and be thankful that he died as he did."

Recollection was slowly dawning on the young girl's mind; yet she struggled to keep back the dreadful truth—to fancy that she had had some terrible dream, and that she now misunderstood her parent.

"He is aboard the cutter, I suppose," she said, wildly—"Oh, papa, you must help him escape."

"What mean you, my child? There! there! calm yourself, and dismiss these thoughts from your mind," said Mr. Clare, soothingly. "Hark!" he suddenly added, "there is the order to fire, on deck. They are within range of the blue clipper, and she will be captured!"

The thunder of a gun now made every timber aboard the cutter rattle.

The din seemed fairly to crash through Mary's brain; it brought vividly to her mind the dreadful truth of her lover's having been shot.

"I remember now!" she wailed, and fell back upon her pillow.

CHAPTER XI.

CUTTING OUT.

THE noises in the smugglers' rendezvous were of course heard by Bend.

"The place is sartinly attacked," muttered he, "and there's a chance of my bein' taken from here."

The noises ceased. The door was opened; some of Watson's men entered.

"You are our prisoner."

"Look at my chin, will ye," said Bend, "and tell me if it ain't an honest one." He had his sou'wester pulled so far down over his face, that only the chin was visible.

"You're a smuggler. We had it from the smuggler captain's own daughter."

Bend shrugged his shoulders, and asked for something to eat, saying he was half starved. One of the men pulled a hard sea-biscuit from his pocket and presented it. Bend's handcuffs having been taken off, he endeavored to reach the biscuit, but could not, much of his strength having deserted him since his confinement. He dropped the biscuit to the floor of his cell, and, kneeling down, struck it a blow with his sharp chin, thus breaking it into four parts.

The seamen were amused.

One of them threw him another biscuit and told him to break that in the same way.

"Ay, ay," answered Bend, "but I must have sea-room. This ere floor is too rough. Take me outside in the passageway, and I'll show you a trick worth seeing. I'll jist toss this biskit in air catchin' it on my chin, and breakin' it in the catch."

"Good—that's trickery for you!" cried one.

They conducted him outside.

"Now stand aside, so as to give me room," he said, motioning them back.

They separated around him. He tossed the biscuit so that it went up outside the ring of spectators inclosing him, toward the rope-ladder leading out of the opening.

He ran as if to catch it on his chin. Instead of doing so, however, he kept on, speeding like a shot toward the rope-ladder. Several pistols cracked, his intention to escape being now evident, but not one of the bullets struck him.

With the celerity of a wild-cat, he mounted the rope-ladder, passed through the opening, and with a few blows of his sheath-knife cutting the ladder in two, sped on like a shot, down the steep declivity.

Reaching the base of the cliff, he beheld a small skiff lying near a rock. Into the little boat he sprang, and, with much difficulty, finally succeeded in gaining the shore.

He darted along, pausing, now and then, to take breath and look behind him. There was as yet no sign of his pursuers to be *seen*, although he fancied he could hear shouts in the distance.

Half dead with fatigue, he arrived in a couple of days at Vera Cruz.

The first object that here met his sight was the blue clipper, Dolphin, lying almost alongside of Captain Watson's vessel—the cutter Roland.

At this sight, Bend uttered a prolonged whistle. Then he squatted down upon the wharf, bringing his hand down upon his knee with a hearty slap.

"*Captured; ay, ay, captured!*"

Suddenly the pupils of his eyes expanded; the white rings around them dilated. He could see only one man aboard pacing the deck, the officer of the watch being seated aft, apparently asleep. He sprung to his feet, as if a sudden idea had crossed his mind.

"One thing is certain," he muttered, "a man can't do any thing well while he's hungry."

So saying he entered a small tavern and partook of some *chee-chee*, with a few slices of bread and butter.

This scant meal refreshed his sinewy frame at once.

He lingered round the city, until near dark, when he entered one of the boats lying manned by youthful oarsmen—most of them Mexicans—alongside the wharf.

"Pull for that blue clipper!"

"Si, señor."

The oars splashed, and the boat flew. When alongside the clipper, it was quite dark.

"Ahoy, there, who's that?" came from the vessel's deck.

"Me," answered Bend, disguising his voice.

As he spoke he threw the Mexican a piece of money; then he sprung from the boat into the schooner's fore chains.

"Who the deuce is 'me'?" came the same voice which had spoken before.

Somebody approached; it was too dark to distinguish faces.

Bend suddenly sprung over the rail, rushed upon the man, caught him by the throat and dealt him a blow that stunned him. Peering down through the darkness, he distinguished the naval dress of one of Watson's men. This was evidently one of the watch. Where were the rest?

Bend had performed a daring movement, but he felt his peril.

"What's the matter, forward, there?" came the authoritative voice of an officer.

"All right, sir," retorted Bend, disguising his voice as much as possible, "I thought somebody was going to board us."

Bend, now, with great celerity, proceeded to envelop himself in the caped cloak the sailor had worn.

Not a moment too soon was this accomplished.

The officer came forward, holding a lantern, he had procured from the main rigging. Bend, pulling the sou'wester he had taken from the man over his brows, hastened to meet him.

"You say you thought some one was trying to board."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Well, look out sharp, now. Remember, you are the only person besides myself aboard from the cutter?"

"I *thought* so; but I am glad it's proven!" was Bend's mental comment.

"Ay, ay, sir," he added, aloud, imitating, as well as he could, the hoarse tones of the sailor who had hailed him.

"Look sharp at the hatches, now and then, to make sure they are all right. Remember, there are over thirty of those infernal smugglers yet aboard, confined in the hold."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The officer walked aft, leaving Bend to chuckle inwardly at the success of his simple *ruse*—a *ruse*, however, which he doubted would have succeeded but for the darkness, and for the fact of his being about the same height as the man he had knocked down.

Having seen the officer return to the quarter-deck, and seat himself where he had been before, in the shadow of the companion-way, Bend deliberately walked to the fore-castle scuttle, and examined the fastenings. These consisted of a handspike and a crowbar, thrust through rings on the edge of the scuttle so as to hold it firmly.

The Cape Cod man soon displacing them, descended into the fore-castle.

"Who's that?" inquired a dozen voices simultaneously, and Bend heard the clanking of a chain.

"It is I," answered the intruder. "Make no noise, but tell me where I can find a light." He was informed that there

was one between the bitts. He procured it, and struck a light, after first carefully reclosing the scuttle, that the glare might not be seen from the quarter-deck.

At sight of him, their shipmate, the poor fellows would have overwhelmed him with questions, but for his enjoining strict silence. He then took a look at their chain. This, one end secured to a post by the fore-castle steps, was fastened to all—thirty men—holding them by turns carefully taken round their limbs, so firmly that, by their own efforts, they were unable to displace them.

To separate the chain from the post would insure the freedom of the prisoners, who, however, having no instrument for the purpose, were, themselves, unable to do so.

Bend, passing into the hold through an opening in the bulk-head, procured an ax, and, with one blow, severed the post.

The chain was then thrown off, and the prisoners were free.

"What noise was that?" now came from the officer of the deck.

"Leave him to me," said Bend, while you run on deck—a few of you—cut the cable, loosen the fore and foretopsail, and the mainsail."

With these words, he sprung on deck, and running aft, threw himself upon the officer with unexpected suddenness, knocking him down the companion-way. Meanwhile the other men, at once comprehending his intention, obeyed the orders he had given.

There was a good off-shore wind—almost a gale—blowing at this time, so that the blue clipper, rapidly swinging round, suddenly darted off like an arrow away from the cutter.

Cries and shouts, with the hasty trampling of feet—the flashing of lanterns, etc., proclaimed that the cutter's watch had detected the sudden disappearance of the clipper.

It was several minutes, however, ere a gun could be cleared away. Then there was a broad, bright flash, and a twelve-pounder thundered, sending its shot whizzing after the clipper, now disappearing in the darkness.

The Dolphin was by this time half a league distant.

"Clear away that ten-pounder, forward!" shouted Bend.

The men with alacrity obeyed every order of their shipmate, all their officers having been taken aboard the cutter.

"FIRE!"

The lightning and thunder of the gun were seen and heard. In the lurid, instantaneous gleam, the sinewy figure of the Cape Cod man was discovered looming up as he stood on the clipper's quarter-rail waving his hat round his head.

"How d'ye like my chin!" he screamed "Ha! ha!"

"BANG?" from the cutter again.

The sea, lashed to foam, gleamed weirdly in the lurid flash. Bend's long chin, white-ringed eyes, as his lithe body, bent over from the rail almost touching the water, were again visible.

His voice went up like a hyena's as he shouted:

"CHEEKS FOR THE BLUE CLIPPER!"

"HOORAY! HOORAY! HOORAY!" responded the swarthy crew.

The schooner keeled over still further to leeward, cloud upon cloud of canvas was unrolled to her very trucks, and humming defiance, she sped on through the white, rolling waters!

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE CAVE.

FOR several days Mary Clare kept her apartment.

Her father was glad to see her at length come on deck.

Then the blue clipper and Wand were again spoken of.

"We had that clipper captured—alongside of us in the harbor of Vera Cruz," said he, "a week ago! but, by some means or other—how none of us have been able to make out—she escaped!"

Mary sighed. She took little interest in the vessel, now that her commander was gone.

Days passed. Mr. Clare watched anxiously, fearing she was going into a decline.

Watson had no effect but that of the most decided repulsion, on her, now.

"My time will come," he muttered.

"Have you overtaken those escaped smugglers, yet?" Mr. Clare one day inquired of him.

"No, sir."

"Too bad," said Clare.

"I shall make my last hunt for them, to-day," said Watson. "Then away we go, on another cruise, after that confounded blue clipper."

With an armed boat's crew he was ashore, soon after. The men hunted in all directions, but met with no better success than before.

At night Watson was hurrying toward the beach where he had left the boat, picking his way by the moonlight down the steep cliff in which had been the smugglers' rendezvous, when he saw ahead of him a female figure, keeping in shadow as much as possible; he followed this figure, which he soon recognized as that of the smuggler's daughter, Nettie.

Lately the guard had been withdrawn from this cliff, so that the girl could now go and come as she liked.

Following her cautiously, Watson at length saw her enter the opening of a cavernous retreat, half concealed by vines. He still followed, and saw her reach the other end of the cave. She pulled out a large stone. Another opening was visible, through which she crawled. This, like the place she had just left, was lighted by a lamp.

"Ay, ay," muttered Watson—"this cliff seems to abound in caverns, hollows and all sorts of winding passages. A criminal might easily conceal himself here without fear of detection."

The truth was, as he subsequently ascertained, that Nettie, on the night her skiff was pursued by Watson's lieutenant, had known that the young man was not shot dead.

She had guided the light vessel to the foot of the precipice, and, concealing her skiff in a hollow, had helped Wand, who had merely been struck in the calf of the leg, by the lieutenant's shot, up the acclivity to the cave which now contained him.

It had, at one period, been used for a store-house.

Some straw, and plenty of old sails were there. Here Nettie made Wand a comfortable couch of the sails, and here she had nursed him ever since he was shot.

Now as Watson gazed, he noticed how her eyes sparkled upon the young captain. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll soon spoil it all," thought he. With these words drawing a pistol, he sprung upon the young man.

"You are mine at last—ha! ha! captain of the blue clipper."

He pointed the pistol at his head.

"Get yourself ready to go with me," he added.

Wand had started, and like a wolf at bay, he now stood glaring at the speaker.

"Move and I fire!" shouted Watson.

"I will not budge an inch to go with you," Wand quietly answered.

"What mean you, sir?" inquired Nettie, putting herself between the two. "What mean you? How can he go with you, so far, when he is just able to walk. A few days ago he could not limp even a few steps. No, you must not expect it."

As she spoke, she leaned over toward the lamp upon the wall and blew it out. All was darkness in the cave.

Watson saw a figure receding before him. He discharged his pistol, and, by the momentary flash, perceived he had made a mistake. The person was Nettie, who, with a scream, fell pierced to the heart.

Watson lighted the lamp with matches, taken from a small tobacco-case in his pocket.

He bent over the young woman. She was dead. He rushed to the opening in the side of the cave, to see a rope dangling far down, and comprehended by this that Wand had made his exit, probably before the pistol was fired.

Still bent upon securing him, notwithstanding the fearful mistake he had just made, he descended the rope, to land upon the beach at the base of the steep rock.

By the moonlight he could detect the tracks of the fugitive's feet. A skiff, which had been there lying, was gone; Wand, it was evident, had by that made his escape.

Suddenly he heard shouts in the distance.

"My men have captured him. Ay, it must be so. He has fallen into their clutches."

Looking out seaward, however, he perceived the cause of the shouts he had heard. Wand was there, putting off in the skiff. He had been seen by Watson's men on the beach.

"Ho! for my boat!" screamed the captain. "I'll soon have that fellow fast."

He soon reached his boat, alongside the beach, by means of a smaller one, in which he had come to this point. His men all there, were soon in their places.

"Give way! Twenty dollars to the man who pulls the best oar in chase of yonder skiff."

The men cheered and worked with a will.

The long boat glided rapidly in the wake of the skiff, fast gaining upon it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRISONER.

BEND was one of those strong-willed men, who, taking the lead in critical moments, are immediately acknowledged as leaders. Moreover, he was one of the best sailors his ship-mates had ever seen, and seemed to have an excellent knowledge of navigation. As a commander, his manner seemed to improve. His gaunt figure straightening, assumed a dignity it had not hitherto shown; even his language at times improved.

A sloop of war had given chase to him, soon after his escape from the cutter; but, by his skillful maneuvering, he had got out of her sight in a few hours.

Not until Bend was several days at sea, did he hear from one of the men—who had had it from some of the cutter's crew—that Wand had been shot.

The news had affected him deeply. He had actually bowed his head and shed tears. Finally he questioned the man as to whether he had heard the full particulars of the event. The sailor was able to give him every information, as the man who had been occasionally put on guard over the prisoners aboard the Dolphin had been communicative.

The round eyes of Bend underwent many changes as he listened.

"How did Watson know Wand was in the cave?" he asked.

"Perhaps he had reason to suspect it."

The Cape Cod man shrugged his shoulders. Then he walked the quarter-deck rapidly and thoughtfully for some time.

Soon after he changed the vessel's course, heading toward Vera Cruz.

He kept on until he came in sight of the conical rocks, whence he had made his escape from Watson's men.

It was now morning; he kept his vessel close hauled, standing off and on. Far away to the eastward a craft lay at anchor.

Bend, inspecting it with his glass, recognized the revenue cutter, the crew of which, owing to the blue color of his vessel, had not, it was evident, yet seen him!

From the crew he now picked out an old salt who had sailed the sea for forty years, and held a long conversation with him, the upshot of which was that the old salt was to take command of the blue clipper during his absence.

"Don't let any thing capture you," said Bend, "that is if you can help it. Keep off shore at night, as much as possible, and show a red and blue light, for which I shall be on the watch."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the old sailor, who, next to Bend, was the best seaman in the ship.

At night the Cape Cod man donned a pair of duck pants, a Guernsey frock and a sou'-wester.

Then he went ashore in a boat, which he immediately sent back to the schooner.

He walked rapidly along the beach until nearly opposite the light of the cutter, lying about half a league distant, when, coolly pulling off his Guernsey, and tying it round his waist, he struck out for the cutter.

He was an excellent swimmer, and in a few minutes he arrived alongside.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted, "be ye all asleep on deck, there?"

Instantly a face was thrust over the rail.

"Who's that?"

"Me," answered Bend. "I'm a poor castaway that wants to ship."

A rope was thrown him, and he clambered aboard, to be surrounded by a number of sailors, among them the officers of the watch.

"What do you want here?" inquired the latter. "Who are you?"

"My name's Jim Catch," answered Bend, stroking his chin. "I was wrecked in the schooner Facker, off this coast. I've made my way here, hopin' you'll ship me, as your vessel is the only American one in these diggin's."

As Bend's manner seemed sincere, the officer said he would speak to the captain. He did so, and Watson at once came on deck to look at the man.

He inspected him closely, without recognizing him, as it had been too dark for him to obtain a good view of this person, on that night when he went to the assistance of Wand at Mr. Clare's mansion.

The quick eye of the captain at once showed him that Bend was every inch a sailor. As he needed a couple of men, he immediately consented to ship the new-comer.

"I pull a good oar," said Bend, "and would like, if you've no objection, to pull in your boat."

As this request was a natural one, the captain thought nothing of the remark.

He said he would see to it. Bend's assumed name was put down upon the book.

He was sent forward to at once attend to his duties.

At about midnight, the captain had his quarter-boat lowered

Bend had been chosen to pull the amidships, in place of a man who, owing to the shortness of his arms, did not give satisfaction in handling so long an oar.

The boat soon struck the beach. Muffled in a cloak, the captain departed, after exchanging a few words with his coxswain.

Soon after he was gone, Bend sauntered along the beach.

The coxswain called him back.

"Who gave you orders to leave the boat?"

"I was only going a little ways," answered Bend, "you sartainly won't object to that."

"If you'll come back in half an hour, you may go," answered the coxswain, who had thus by Watson been instructed to deal with the men.

"I sartinly will be back in that time, *sir*," answered Bend—at once winning the coxswain to good will by "sirring" him. He moved along until out of sight of the boat, when he struck rapidly in the direction Watson had taken.

Meanwhile, the captain kept on for about a mile, when, near the angle of a rock, he met a tall figure, muffled in a cloak.

The two men communed together for some time.

It was pitch dark, so that neither could see the face of the other.

Suddenly the full moon burst forth from behind a black cloud. Then the faces of both men were distinctly revealed to the watchful gaze of Bend, crouching in the shadow of a clump of shrubbery, within ten feet of the speakers. The light eyes of the Cape Cod man gleamed like a wild-cat's, as he listened, while his orbs expanded to thrice their natural size. He turned, as the moon was again hidden, and in less than half an hour, was again by the boat.

Nearly another half-hour passed ere Captain Watson returned, bearing with him something under his cloak.

The eyes of Bend might have been seen, through the darkness, to scintillate like sparks of fire.

The boat was soon alongside the cutter, where it was left, not to be hoisted until next day, as there was work to be done on the outside of the cutter.

It was Bend's watch on deck for two hours after. He cautiously crept aft, and peering down through the grating in the cabin, he beheld a sight, which seemed to interest him much: Captain Watson carefully inspecting a ledger book he had obtained, and making copies from it upon a long, thin roll of paper.

"What are you doing, there?" said a gruff voice behind Bend.

The Cape Cod man sprung to his feet, to confront the officer of the watch.

"Beg pardin, sir," he said, humbly—"but it looked so nice down there, sir, d'ye see—"

"Go forward, where you belong."

Bend, humbly saluting, slunk forward. When his time on deck had expired, he did not go below.

With the watchfulness of a lynx, he sat in the foretop, his eyes turned aft.

The officer of the watch had gone below to call his relief.

Up came the captain, a moment later, and moved over to the lee-rail with something in his hand.

There was a light splash as he threw the article into the sea, then retreated into the cabin.

Bend descended rapidly to the deck. He crept swiftly away until nearly amidship, when he dropped into the boat lying alongside. From this he lowered himself into the sea, and dove like a shark into the clear waters, procuring the thing the captain had thrown over, ere it had sunk many fathoms. It was a long manuscript book, which Bend thrust quickly beneath his Guernsey. He then returned to the deck before the other watch had come up.

At daylight the officer of the deck ordered Bend aft. He was sent into the cabin as a guard—there being no marines in the cutter—over a prisoner, who, he was informed, had recently been captured. The prisoner was confined in an apartment in the cabin, the door of which was locked upon him.

Watson, however, had taken the precaution to have an armed man stationed, night and day, at the door. The men relieved each other regularly, at this post, every two hours.

Provided with the cutlass which the deck officer had given him, Bend soon was pacing to and fro by the door.

A face now appeared at a small opening—a sort of grating for ventilation in the top of the door.

Bend drew back unable to repress a slight cry of surprise, on recognizing Captain Wand!

So this was the prisoner—the man whom he (Bend) had been informed had been shot!

The Cape Cod man could scarcely believe his senses. His joy was excessive, at recognizing Wand, alive and well.

“Guard,” said the young man, “will you inform the captain that I need some fresh drinking-water, here. That which has been left me is no better than bilge-water.”

Bend glancing carefully around him, to make sure that no

person was within hearing, answered in his natural voice, at the same time holding up his finger to caution the prisoner.

"Ay, ay, Captain Wand."

Wand started.

"I know that voice," he said, in a whisper.

"Ay, captain, it is me—Bend," answered the Cape Cod man, now drawing back, so that from his position, Wand might obtain a good view of him.

At that moment, approaching steps were heard.

Wand gave Bend a significant look, and at once removed his face from the opening.

The next moment Captain Watson appeared.

"Wand!" he exclaimed, loud enough for the young man to hear him, "your blue clipper has again hove in sight, and as there is a frigate to windward of her, she can not escape us except by running upon the rocks of the coast."

"I expected this," the young man answered. "Ay, I expected it."

"A court-martial will then be held, sir, and you will probably be sentenced to be hung at the yard-arm!"

As this announcement passed the lips of Watson, Mary Clare, who, seated in her room, was a victim to the most poignant anguish at her lover's capture, heard those dreadful words.

She had seen the young man brought aboard on that night when, in his skiff, he had endeavored vainly, as the sequel shows, to escape Watson's long-boat.

By the glare of the ship's lanterns, the lovers had recognized each other.

Mr. Clare, also on deck, had approached the prisoner, as he was being led below.

"Unfortunate young man," he had said, noticing the sad, pale countenance of Wand—"I am very sorry—very, to see you in this plight; the more so, as your treachery will evidently be punished with a hasty, ignominious death."

Mary Clare had tottered toward her lover, and fallen down in a swoon, partly from joyous surprise at seeing him alive, mingled with the painful reaction of feeling at the thought of the gloomy fate before him.

She had, however, indulged faint hopes of his escape—had thought that something might turn up in his favor. The

words of Watson, on this day, however, drowned every hope.

She went on deck to breathe the pure sea air, for there was a stifling sensation in her throat.

Not long was she there, when Watson came to her side.

She turned to leave him, when he gently laid his hand on her arm.

"I have something to say concerning Mr. Wand," he said.

She paused and he went on, having first glanced around him to make sure there was no danger of his being heard.

"Wand will be tried—condemned to death. It rests with you to save him."

"With me?"

"Yes. Consent to be my wife, and I will use my utmost endeavors to get him clear—ay, you must, by this time, have guessed the state of my feelings toward you, and I know I can depend upon you to keep secret what I am about to say.

"I will contrive that Wand shall escape from my vessel. He shall conceal himself where he can not be found, and shall subsequently leave for some European port. The man is young, and some allowance must be made for the temptations of youth. He was probably beguiled into the smuggler business by some artful person, older than himself."

"Nay," said Mary, "do not try to cover your motives thus."

"I have no wish to. What I say I mean. If you will be my wife, the youth shall go free."

She gave him a haughty glance.

"No, sir. Wand would not buy his freedom thus. Sooner would he perish—sooner would I see him perish, than suffer the agony of my being another's."

With this she swept away and descended to her room.

Watson's face grew black.

"The youth shall suffer the worst," he muttered—"ay, the very worst!"

The cutter, which, by this time, was well under way, was plowing up blue water in rapid chase of the clipper, about a league distant.

To windward the frigate also was rapidly overhauling her. She was standing along the coast under every thing she could carry.

Suddenly a gun boomed over the sea from the frigate, and the jib-boom of the clipper flew to splinters.

The decks of the cutter were now crowded with her men, all jubilant at what seemed a certain prospect of capturing the long-sought-for prize.

Another shot boomed along from the frigate, and again the splinters flew from the clipper, her weather-quarter sail now suffering. Shot after shot continued to pour upon her, until finally her foremast was seen to go by the board.

Cheers now rung from the cutter's crew.

She had come up into the wind, with every sail flapping. The war-vessel bore down upon her, and, in a few minutes, she was lying alongside—under the guns of the frigate—a CAPTURED PRIZE!

“Good!” said Watson, rubbing his hands.

“This, unfortunately, is only one party of the lawless fellows,” remarked Mr. Clare. “I wish we could find out the rendezvous of them all.”

Signals were now exchanged between Watson's vessel and the frigate. The young man had his boat lowered, and went aboard.

In a few hours he returned with marines, and issued orders to his first lieutenant.

Wand was then led up from below. The young man looked strangely indifferent, until Mary Clare came to take a last look at the prisoner, who, she had been informed, was to be transferred to the frigate.

Then he turned his face away, as, handcuffed and guarded by the marines, he was led into the boat alongside.

Pale and tearless, Mary leaned over the rail watching him, until she could see him no longer. Then she went below, and her father vainly endeavored, all that day, to draw her from her apartment, from which, now and then, came stifled sobs.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIRE!

ON the morning after Nettie, as described, had been accidentally shot by Watson, Captain Malo, with half a dozen men, entered the cave.

At sight of his child, lying dead before him, on the rocky floor of the cavern, the smuggler gave way to sincere demonstrations of grief.

Heartless as the man had always been, he had loved his daughter deeply. Proud of her dark beauty, he had spent hundreds of dollars that she might have the means of decking her person in such attire as would set off her charms.

It was in fact partly for her sake that he had entered into his lawless but profitable calling, hoping in time to retire with a large fortune, and live like a gentleman, as he expressed it, with Nettie to grace his mansion.

Now his fondest hopes were dashed to the ground. He bowed his head upon his breast, and sobbed aloud.

"Avenge her! avenge her!" said a voice behind him, when, turning, he beheld Boker.

"Hush!" said the captain, sternly.

"Ay, I understand," moaned Boker, "for the sake of having that fellow to—"

Again Malo checked him; then he stooped and kissed his child.

A moment later she was borne from the cavern.

At night, two days after, a grave was dug beneath a tall palmetto tree, and there the remains of Nettie, inclosed in a handsome coffin, which Malo had had made by one of his ship's carpenters, was buried.

Sadly the captain turned away from the spot, as the last shovelful of earth was thrown upon the grave.

All was still around, except the hooting of a solitary night-bird in the branches of the palmetto.

Soon, however, a crippled form, supported by a stick, limped to the grave.

It was Boker, who, during the retreat from the rendezvous, had fallen and nearly broken his legs.

He threw himself down, and wept like a child. At full length he lay upon the grave, his face to the earth, sobbing and moaning.

Suddenly a shadow fell upon the ground. The moon had emerged from behind a cloud, so that this shadow was sharply defined.

Boker saw it not—saw not Watson, who now stood behind him.

The captain touched him with his foot. The man turned round, beheld the intruder, and, with a howl, sprung to his feet.

"See what you have done—see there!" wailed Boker, pointing at the grave—"the only being I ever loved on earth sleeps forever—murdered by your hand!"

"I feel sorry for you," answered Watson, "but say not *murdered*. I fired at another, and the shot struck *her*."

"It is all the same. You had no business to fire in the dark. It was brutal carelessness. You shall suffer for it. I will have my revenge."

"What do you mean? Be careful. In reality, Captain Wand was the main cause of the accident, as, had not he been there, I would not have fired. Well, you have had your revenge. I captured Wand, and he is now a handcuffed prisoner aboard the frigate! He will be disgraced—he will die an ignoble death."

This allusion to the man whom Boker had deemed his favored rival, was like putting fuel on fire.

"You fired the shot, you did the deed. I repeat, I will be revenged. You know what I mean!"

Watson turned as pale as death.

"Come with me aboard the cutter," he said, sternly. "You are my prisoner!"

Weak and crippled though he was, Boker raised the staff he carried, aiming a furious blow at Watson.

The latter easily dodging it, seized the mate by the throat, and drew him along, a short distance.

Then, applying a whistle to his mouth, he was soon joined by several of his men, evidently come from his boat, lying alongside the beach.

Among them was Bend.

The prisoner said something in Spanish—a language not understood by the men.

Watson smiled triumphantly.

“Here is a smuggler I have captured,” said he; “take him to the boat.”

He was obeyed, and the man was soon in the cutter’s run.

He sat down on a coil of rigging, apparently buried in deep thought.

Then he rose, and, fumbling in his pocket, drew forth a small match-box.

“*She is gone,*” he muttered, “and I have nothing to live for. *He* thinks, by keeping me here, to prevent the revenge I would have taken. Be it so; I will take another. *This vessel shall never leave her anchorage at this place.* If I could make sure that he would finish with her, as *I* probably shall, then I would be satisfied.”

He crept forward until his hands came in contact with a bunch of dry oakum.

He struck a match, and lighted it.

The dry stuff blazed rapidly. The flames crept along, lighting a pile of tarred ropes; then further yet, until the whole run was in a blaze.

Boker sat with arms folded and head bowed. The place was full of smoke; already he was nearly suffocated. The heat of the flames was oppressive. All round him they crackled and roared. He fell forward, gasping as they encircled him.

“FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!” now rung on deck. A smile of exultation lighted the face of the dying man.

That was his last smile.

With a crash, the timbers above his head fell in red ruin upon him.

In her apartment, where, until now, she had been tossing restlessly to and fro, Mary Clare heard that fearful cry, and saw a broad flash of light streaming before her eyes. She sprung up, hastily dressing herself, and endeavored to unlock her door. In her haste, she bent the key, so that it was useless.

Meanwhile the flames were roaring and crackling louder, every moment.

"Mary! Mary!" came her father's voice. "My child! my child!"

All was uproar and confusion without; her father's voice was soon drowned in the din.

She pushed at the door, with all her might, yet it would not give way, beneath her tiny strength.

Her apartment was now full of smoke. Above the cracks in the door, she could see long, slender columns of flame, creeping in; she knew, by the roaring noise, that the fire was right at her door.

"Break it open," cried a number of voices.

"Impossible," answered another, "we can not get through the fire."

Mary sunk, half-fainting from terror, against her berth.

She could now again hear the agonizing cries of her parent, calling upon the men without to save her.

Wet canvas was being thrown upon the flames to give the men a chance to get at the door.

Vain, however, such efforts, Mary's apartment being nearly over the larboard side of the run, the fire had burst through the planking outside her door, before it was discovered.

Now it was raging all through the cabin, driving the men back, every time they approached the red torrent.

Soon a fearful cry was heard:

"THE POWDER-MAGAZINE!"

The fire was near it; it must explode in a few minutes, and blow up the cutter. Captain Watson issued several hasty orders. Wet canvas was thrown over the powder, and some of the men were pouring a stream of water upon it with a hose, when a long tongue of flame was seen to approach within a foot of it.

"TO THE BOATS!—ALL HANDS!" screamed Watson.

The boats had already been lowered.

Into them the men proceeded to descend, some of them dragging after them Mr. Clare, who had said that, if his daughter must perish, he would perish with her.

The boats were not large enough to hold all the men; so some of them plunged into the water, swimming for the boats of the frigate, which, by this time, were coming to their assistance.

Meanwhile Tom Bend, the Cape Cod man, coolly disobeying orders, had slung himself over the quarter by a staging and, with a huge ax, was endeavoring to force open the planking, hoping in this way to afford an exit for Mary Clare.

The strength this man exerted was tremendous. The ponderous ax swept the air with lightning rapidity, and at every blow, did good work. The plan might have succeeded admirably, but for the powder magazine.

By the time the lowered boats were twenty fathoms from the cutter, and Bend was anticipating success with a few more blows, the fire struck the magazine. The wetting of the powder and the canvas upon it deadened the explosion.

As it was, however, it was terrific enough to appal the stoutest heart.

The whole forward part of the cutter was ripped up, and some of the planks and timbers sent flying many feet in the air.

For several moments a thick smoke enveloped the remnants of the vessel; then lurid flames were seen bursting from the black canopy. The foremast went over with a terrific crash, the mainmast followed. The after part of the vessel, which, with the exception of a few timbers, projecting here and there like broken ribs, forward, was the only part of the wreck remaining above the water, was enveloped in a sea of flame.

Tom Bend, though thrown many feet from his position by the shock, and scorched and blackened, was not seriously injured. He struck out and soon reached the mainmast, to which he clung, until he was picked up by the foremost boat from the frigate.

"Where is *she*, Bend?" inquired a quick, eager voice, and looking up, the man beheld Wand, *no longer a prisoner*, standing upright in the bow of the boat.

"She is where no one can help her now," answered Bend, despairingly; "shut up in the midst of that sea of fire, in the cabin."

Wand instantly divested himself of his coat and shoes.

The officer of the boat remonstrated, but the young man was not to be deterred from his purpose. He plunged over, ran along the mainmast, and was, a moment later, lost to the view in the rolling canopy of smoke.

Meanwhile, almost dead with terror, Mary Clare had sunk down on her knees, to the floor of her room, grasping the side of her berth.

The shock of the explosion had thrown her violently to one side; she had risen to see the apartment full of flames, now bursting in on every side. The heat almost suffocated her. Gazing round her upon the hissing, roaring fire-caldron, she gave herself up as lost.

This part of the vessel had now keeled over, so that the water also entered the room through small openings made by Bend's ax. But for these openings the poor girl must soon have perished.

Suddenly the blows of the ax, which she had previously heard, were renewed. Timbers and planks soon gave way, and a nimble form crawled into this fiery oven.

It was Captain Wand!

There was no time to lose. The water, roaring and gurgling, was already bursting into the lower openings made; in a few minutes the apartment must be overflowed.

The young girl, tottering forward, fell half-fainting into the arms of her lover, gasping out his name. He caught her tightly round the waist, and with his burden, plunged into the sea, to be picked up by the frigate's boats.

A minute later, down went all that remained of the cutter; a few fiery timbers, with hissing, gurgling sound, disappearing in the sea!

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

It was the night following the destruction of the cutter; a dark night, the moon hidden by heavy clouds.

A small boat left the frigate, containing one man. This person was Tom Bend.

He worked the boat to the foot of the conical rocks with a pair of paddles. Below him there was another boat—a skiff, which a man, muffled in a cloak, and wearing a mask, had

Just left, making his way up one of the steep cliffs. In a few minutes Bend guided his boat to the same spot, and commenced ascending the acclivity, keeping his gaze upon the outline of the other person's figure, dimly visible in the gloom.

As he moved on, a couple of large boats, manned by men-o'-war's-men, also arrived on the base of the precipice.

Suddenly a hollow, rumbling sound was heard, and tongues of lurid flame were seen issuing from one of the conical peaks. A couple of men left the frigate's larger boat, and steadily mounted the cliff, until near the summit, when they peered down through a large crevice near the opening, whence issued the flames.

"Bend was right," said the voice of one of the persons; "do you see?"

"Ay, ay," answered the other; "a cunning contrivance to keep vessels away so as to avoid detection."

In fact, these people saw half a dozen men, with muskets, away down under the cliff, in the rocky vestibule which had led to the smugglers' retreat.

These men, standing by a large fire, which they had kindled with old pieces of tarred rigging, and fed with timber and other material, would occasionally load their muskets and discharge them, producing that rattling, rumbling sound, which had been heard—made to resemble the noise of a volcano. Meanwhile the flames ascending, rose many feet above the opening, one of the men augmenting their effect by now and then pouring oil upon them.

"Truly a novel volcano," said one of the spectators above. "I could have sworn, had I seen this from the sea, that it was a *bona fide* volcano, and should, therefore, have given this coast a wide berth. It is to frighten our frigate away that these fellows, like imps of darkness, at work in infernal regions, are thus busying themselves."

So saying, the speaker whispered a few words to his companion, when both descended the cliff. A few minutes after, a strong party of armed men-o'-war's-men were stationed near the burning opening.

Meanwhile, Bend still continued to follow the dim figure ahead of him.

Soon the figure crawled into an opening among the rocks, concealed by shrubbery.

On he went until he arrived at a large rocky hall, nearly of the same dimensions as the other smuggler retreat, and which was lighted by a lamp stuck in a rocky niche. A piece of blackened canvas, hung over the opening leading to it, hid this light.

As the cloaked figure entered, about a hundred men sitting and reclining on rough mats, in this retreat, sprung up, drawing pistols, and cutlasses, with which they were armed.

On recognizing the new-comer, however, which they seemed to do at once, they resumed their seats, while one among them, Captain Malo, advanced.

To and fro the two walked, engaged in earnest conversation.

"Nothing would be easier," said Captain Malo, as they finally came to a halt near the piece of tarred canvas, behind which Tom Bend was, by this time, stationed, "and as true as I am a living man, as soon as the deed is done, you shall get the money—half the sum I have been years in obtaining."

"Ay, but think of the risk," said the other, lowering his voice—"it would be next to impossible for me to set the frigate on fire without detection. To tell the truth, I would not like to do it, either, not even for the sum you propose. I have hitherto winked at your proceedings, and endeavored thus to keep you along, but I can not go so far as to set an American frigate on fire."

"Be it so," answered the other, angrily—"from this moment I would dissolve all connections with you, only—"

"You know I could tell tales!" interrupted the other, laughing.

"Do you threaten?" inquired Malo, frowning and laying a hand on the pistol in his belt.

"Nay, I have no intention of betraying you, since you could retaliate on me. We have sworn to help each other, and let us continue as hitherto. Only do not ask me to go so far as to fire the frigate."

For full an hour longer the twain conversed; then Wilkins departed.

As he passed through the outer opening of the cave, a man

sprung upon him, collaring him and pointing a pistol at his head.

"*You are my prisoner !*"

The speaker was Tom Bend.

"And what for?" queried Wilkins, speaking in a different voice from that he had hitherto used.

He was evidently much agitated—trembling in every limb.

"It is useless; you are trapped," said Bend, dashing the mask from the fellow's face. "I know you, *Captain Watson*—a traitor to your Government!"

Even as he spoke, a number of lanterns gleamed. All round them, the rocks were alive with men-o'-war's-men from the frigate.

Watson turned white; seen in the glare of the lantern, his face was livid, as the men closed round him.

"And who are you?" he faltered, "that dare accuse me of treason; I, who routed the smugglers from their retreat—who—"

"You are a cunning rascal," interrupted Bend. "Your attack upon the smugglers in their retreat was a feigned one, that you might have the appearance of being zealous in the performance of your duty, and win the good opinion of Mary Clare and her father, by seeming to rescue the girl from the smugglers' hands. In this you deceived even your own men and officers, who had no suspicion of the double part you were playing. Before making the attack, you warned the smuggler captain, so that he had every thing ready to leave, the moment your men should pour through the opening!"

"How know you this?" gasped Watson.

The other pulled from beneath his Guernsey, the book he had obtained, after Watson had thrown it overboard.

"This contains all the necessary information, with a copy of your note to Malo, a night or two before the attack. The smuggler was very methodical in all his dealings!"

At sight of the book Watson started.

Then, suddenly, from his pocket he pulled a pistol, aiming it at his own head. Ere he could discharge it, he was in the firm grasp of several men.

"For God's sake, who are you?" he again asked of Bend.

"*Jack Percival, commonly called Mad Jack, at your service,*" answered the other, coolly.

Watson drew back with a cry of surprise. He had often heard of this celebrated personage among naval men, but had never hitherto seen him, as the two had always been employed on different stations.

"Ay," answered Mad Jack, "I had a roving commission, and, having heard from the Secretary of the Navy, that some one of the United States naval officers must wink at the smugglers' business, otherwise the outlaws would not succeed so well, I shipped as foremast-hand aboard Captain Wand's vessel, being in a certain secret, connected with that craft. But enough of this; now is our time, lads!"

A moment later a hundred and fifty men burst in upon the smugglers, led by Mad Jack, some of the frigate's officers and *Captain Wand*.

Thus surprised, the outlaws made but feeble resistance, and were soon overpowered.

They were all conveyed, under a strong guard, to the frigate, to be confined in the vessel's hold.

Meanwhile, Mary Clare, who had been made ill by her recent excitement, reclined in the berth of the apartment which had been assigned her by the frigate's commander. Her father sat by her side, clasping her hand, and endeavoring to soothe her, as with burning cheek and feverishly-glowing eyes, she muttered incoherently on different subjects, in which she frequently mentioned the name of Captain Wand.

The doctor aboard the frigate had forbidden all excitement, as she was delirious and there was danger of severe brain-fever.

Suddenly the poor girl started up, her eyes gleaming wildly upon her parent.

"Oh, papa! they are killing him! killing him for treason. He is dying, now!"

Just then there was a knock at the door, which being opened, admitted the doctor, who, having felt of the patient's pulse, administered an opiate.

"How now?" inquired Mr. Clare, in a whisper; "is she better?"

"There is a decided improvement," was the answer; "a little sleep will make her still better."

"Will it not be safe—will it not, in fact, do her good, to explain about Wand, when she wakes?"

‘No, sir, not yet. The excitement would be too much, especially as she would only partly understand you in the present state of her mind.’

Soon after, Mary fell into a deep slumber.

“That is as it should be,” said the doctor, as he bent over to hear the patient’s breathing.

At about this time Mad Jack was seated in another part of the cabin with the frigate’s commander, who was carefully perusing the book, or smuggler’s ledger, which the former had obtained.

And where was Captain Wand? He was on the quarter-deck, pacing it, awaiting the reappearance of the doctor.

The moment this worthy came out, he anxiously questioned him as to the state of Mary Clare.

“Don’t be impatient, Sir Smuggler,” answered the doctor, rubbing his hands. “She is doing as well as can be expected.”

The young man, much relieved, descended into the cabin, and was soon closeted with Mad Jack and Captain Knight—the frigate’s commander.

Next morning, Mary being much better, Mr. Clare was permitted to make the explanation he had intended.

The poor girl’s first question, when she waked, had been of Captain Wand. Recollections of past events rushing upon her mind, she remembered the young man having rescued her from the burning vessel.

“Mary,” said her father, now making his appearance, “I have that to state which will be pleasant to you—more so, even, than it was to me.”

“Oh, papa where is HE—what have they done with him?”

“It is of him that I am about to speak. Instead of being a smuggler, as we supposed, he has been playing a noble part. It seems that Malo, captain of those rascals, went to Wand, some time ago, to tempt him to become a smuggler—mentioning the large profits, etc. He had first ‘sounded’ our young man, it seems, with obscure hints, endeavoring to foster the discontent which he then felt at his disappointment in not having been promoted. That he was induced to do this by another, we have now ascertained, from letters obtained from the smugglers’ retreat, and signed by Wilkins, *alias* Watson—the object

of the latter being to get Wand out of his way that he might win *you* for a wife. He adopted this plan, thinking that you would never overlook TREASON, that it would forever destroy your love for the young man."

"Oh, papa!"

"Well, Wand, zealous to serve the Government, *pretended* to be influenced by the smuggler's persuasions, and, at a second interview, almost promised to become one of these sea-out-laws.

"He went to Washington, saw the Secretary of the Navy, and the plan of the 'blue clipper business' was at once devised. In his character as captain of a smuggler craft, Wand hoped to find out the secret of the whole nest of smugglers, and thus 'root' them, as it were, out of the land. The matter was to be kept a secret from everybody—naval men and all, (a certain John Percival excepted,) until the young man should actually be captured and threatened with a court-martial, when a sealed packet in his possession would explain matters.

"Wand, however, asked a favor which was granted by the authorities employing him. This was that he might tell you the secret as soon as he could make you his wife, but not before. Hence his hurry, which so astonished us all, on a certain night, to wed his bride."

"Oh, papa, if you had only known! It was cruel of the Government not to let him tell us, at once."

"The Government was too careful for that. Not knowing your character, it was probably afraid that you might tell tales. In case of marriage, Wand was to take you with him, so that this danger would be prevented. A woman's tongue—"

"Never mind about that, papa; the Government ought to be whipped for its cruelty." And she clenched both little fists.

"Well, my dear child, Wand, without knowing it, had among his crew a celebrity, no less a person than John Percival, or Mad Jack, as he is usually termed. This man being on a sort of roving commission, concluded to amuse himself.

"With the knowledge of the Secretary of the Navy, he shipped in the Blue Clipper, pretending to be a native of Cape Cod, anxious to earn the good wages offered by Wand. He

was to watch the young man, keenly, and ascertain how well he acted his part, with a view to the former's promotion, in case he withstood the many trying ordeals through which, in his assumed character of smuggler, he would be obliged to pass. Well, my dear, I have to state that he has performed his duty well, as, by his daring intrepidity, and perseverance, the smuggler retreat has been discovered, and a book, containing the secrets and places of rendezvous of other smugglers, has been obtained.

"Through the pretended Cape Cod man, Mad Jack, another discovery has been made; the treason of Captain Watson, who, all the while, it seems, has been in league with the smugglers, thus, for so long a time, enabling them to avoid detection."

"He is a miserable traitor; and I have good reason to suspect that it was through him you were carried to Malo's retreat, that he might seem to rescue you when making his pretended attack on the rendezvous"

So saying, and after Mary had expressed her surprise, Mr Clare rose to go on deck.

"Papa!"

"Well."

"Where is Captain Wand?"

Mr. Clare, smiling, opened the door and called, when the young man appeared.

Not even her father's presence could, on this joyful occasion, prevent Mary from flying to her lover's arms.

"You will never leave me again?" she said, gently, when the greeting was over.

"No, you shall accompany me on all my cruises," answered the young man.

Mary blushed deeply. Joyful as a bird, she rapidly recovered her health and spirits.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CLIPPER'S PERIL.

CAPTAIN WAND, with a party of men, went aboard the blue clipper, which was soon repaired so that she was ready for sailing.

Three days after the events described, the young captain came to bid Mary adieu for the present. The prisoners had been transferred to the hold of the clipper, to be conveyed at once to New Orleans, as the frigate was under orders to remain awhile at Vera Cruz.

When Wand held out his hand to Miss Clare, she turned pale and trembled.

"It is only for a short time," said the young captain; "we will meet again at New Orleans."

"I know not why," she faltered, "but I feel strangely about this—as if something evil would happen; as if—" here tears came to her eyes—"I shall never see you again. Papa," she added, addressing her father, who was not far off—"why can not we go in the clipper with Mr. Wand?"

The old gentleman's eyes twinkled.

"So you can not bear to be separated from him, even for a few weeks. I can wind up my business at Vera Cruz, where you know I have an agent, in a short time. I would like to see him about some casks of sugar, and—"

Mary, pouting, held up her hand.

"Let your sugar go, dear papa," said she. "I think we had better sail in the blue clipper."

Mr. Clare allowed himself to be persuaded.

Wand, delighted, gave Mary a grateful glance.

The three were soon aboard the clipper, which, with a fair wind, went bowling seaward, Wand politely returning a parting salute fired from some of the frigate's guns.

The vessel made good headway on the first day, but, on the second, head-wind sprang up and knocked her considerably off her course.

Wand did not like the looks of the sky nor of the sun.

The latter was of a dusky hue, with a greenish ring around it, and a strange red-looking vapor partially obscuring it.

"What do you think, sir?" the young captain inquired of Mad Jack, who now accompanied him as a passenger.

Percival seized a spy-glass, and leveled it skyward.

"Going to have a screamer, sir!" he said, his eyes alight with a peculiar gleam—"never saw the sun look that way but once before, and that was when, years ago, I was cast away, here in the gulf, and for three days clung to the bottom of a boat!"

Mary now turned pale, and shrunk closely to Wand's side.

In spite of her terror, however, one could plainly see that the strong, confident natures of such men as Percival and Wand inspired her with a feeling of security.

A strange, humming sound was now heard, through the air above their heads, as if some hollow instrument were being sounded by hosts of invisible beings.

The vapor over the sun seemed to go round and round; the planet was of a blood-red hue.

Suddenly a peculiar, thin-looking haze was seen flying along toward the schooner from windward. Beneath it the water was lashed to a foam, and the spray flew up in long, ragged columns, thus showing the violence of the gale in that quarter.

"*Here it comes!*" cried Percival.

"Hands by the halliards!" howled Wand.

In a few minutes the little schooner was surging along under close-reefed foretop-sail and topmast staysails.

Just then there was a sound like a clap of thunder. The whole heavens, by this time obscured by a dense, black, vapor like smoke, were lighted by a lurid gleam, which lasted for several minutes. In this weird, ghastly glare, the ocean presented a singular aspect. Little points of blue flame were seen running along the waves, up the schooner's sides and her shrouls and masts, while the faces of the seamen, receiving the strange glow, looked livid.

"God help us!" gasped Mary.

Wand squeezed her hand, reassuringly, and advised her to go below.

She went into the companion-way, but remained on the

landing of the staircase, peering through the opening in the door, now closed to keep out the coming spray.

The electric gleam mentioned had now passed—darkness, almost like that of night, closed round the schooner.

A roar, as if an army of sea-lions were approaching, made every timber in the little vessel shake.

The white water came rapidly down from windward—there was a howl—a shriek—a weird screaming, and the blue clipper was caught in one of the most terrific gales that ever plowed up the gulf. Down she went—the gallant little craft—upon her beam-ends, and then, with a loud report, away she flew like a bolt shot from a gun!

Tearing through the mad waves, her bows were engulfed in the caldron of hissing, boiling waters, the spray enveloped her as if in a shroud, and flew to the very tops of her swaying, cracking masts.

A long, continuous hollow humming was heard through the din of roaring seas and creaking timbers.

“Mind yourself at that wheel!” screamed Wand to an old tar, who, in dripping jacket and sou’wester, guided the little schooner.

“Ay, ay, sir!”

The seas were now making mad music all over the vessel. Fore and aft they swept her decks, crashing, roaring, swashing—carrying away a portion of the galley, the wheel-house, and the weather bulwarks.

A sound like the report of a cannon was soon heard, as the hatches of the main hold, which had been carefully battened down, were ripped open, and sent flying into the ocean.

Through the opening the water poured like a cataract upon the prisoners below, whose cries of terror went up amidst the din of the storm. They must all have been drowned, and the schooner waterlogged, but for the prompt action of Mad Jack and Wand, who, seizing tarpaulins, rushed amidships, and with the help of the sailors, soon secured the canvas over the hatch.

Nevertheless, from the great quantity of water which had already entered the hold, the situation of the prisoners was still both uncomfortable and perilous. Thrown away to leeward, they were huddled, like sheep, almost on the top of each other.

Common humanity urging Wand to relieve them, he ordered some of the sailors to knock away part of the planking separating the main from the fore-hold, that the prisoners might have a larger space to themselves.

By this time, the violence of the storm having abated, the sailors were enabled to easily accomplish their task. Having done so they were hurrying to the deck to fasten the hatches down over the fore-hold, when some of the prisoners, who, owing to a scant supply of irons aboard the frigate, had not been handcuffed, threw themselves upon the men, hauled them back into the hold, and began a furious assault upon them.

"That's it, my lads!" screamed Watson, who, heavily ironed, sat in the after part of the hold. "Give it to them! Kill the rascals, and *we will take the clipper!*"

At this all the prisoners cheered like fiends.

The clipper's men, furiously assailed on all sides, and vainly endeavoring to defend themselves, were knocked down, stunned and bruised—some of them almost killed.

Wand and Mad Jack, hearing the noise, had not time to advance three steps when those of the prisoners who were not handcuffed, thirty men in all, sprung on deck.

"Blast 'em!" exclaimed Percival, "they should have been tied like sheep, as I advised, when the frigate's captain told me he had not irons enough for all."

"That would have been useless, as they would have contrived to loosen their cords!" said Wand.

While speaking the two men had not been idle.

They had summoned round them such of the crew—twenty in all—as were on deck, nineteen men being aloft, shaking a reef out of the fore-topsail. These twenty men were quickly provided with cutlasses, and headed by Wand, who was about leading them to drive the escaped prisoners back into the hold, when the latter having seized one of the guns forward, an old twelve-pounder, well loaded, "slew" (turned) it round toward the advancing party.

"FIRE!" shouted one of the smugglers—a tall fellow, wearing a blue cap and black shirt.

The gun thundered.

Wand had led his men to one side, but not in time for all to escape the deadly discharge.

Three poor fellows bounded up screaming, then fell dead, their bodies rolling into the lee scuppers.

"Hooray! hooray!" yelled the smugglers.

Those below answering with shrieks, the schooner seemed turned into a Pandemonium.

Meanwhile the men aloft were now descending to help their shipmates.

Their foes perceiving this, one of them caught up an ax lying near the cook-house, and commenced cutting away the foremast.

"Now, men!" cried Wand to his party—"now is our time!"

With a cheer, the band advanced.

At that moment there was a crash, as the half-severed foremast went over, the gale having assisted the man with the ax.

The shrouds and stays having only partially given way, the mast hung across the shattered bulwarks, and behind this the smugglers now took their station.

The poor fellows who had been aloft were seen clinging to that part of the mast hanging in the sea.

The schooner's peril was now twofold. Menaced with capture by the smugglers, and with destruction by the storm, she lay half buried in the roaring seas.

The smugglers posted on the forecastle deck, were out of the water, but their assailants were nearly up to their waists in it, and were obliged now and then to hold on hard to save themselves from being washed overboard.

Provided with handspikes and crowbars, the mutineers could therefore easily keep the attacking party at bay.

Suddenly a fearful cry went through the schooner.

"LAND 'O! RIGHT AHEAD!"

There, sure enough, looming up through the storm-mist, were the rocks off the coast of Yucatan, the schooner having been driven in this direction by the gale.

There was no time to lose. Something must be done, and that speedily.

Percival was the man for the hour. While Wand was forcing a passage toward the smugglers through tangled ropes and through cataracts of water, he darted on the outside of the schooner, and running along to the fore-chains, suddenly bounded over the heads of his foes upon the forecastle deck!

Ere they could turn upon him, he had the swivel—a nine-pounder—pointed toward them.

“Back, every man of you!” he thundered, “or I will blow you all to perdition!”

He knew the gun was not loaded—knew also that the smugglers were unacquainted with this fact.

They drew back shrinking; the fiery glance of Mark Jack following every movement.

“Back into the hold!” continued Percival.

The smugglers, however, instead of obeying, sprung upon the wreck of the foremast, intending to get to the other side of it, where they would be out of range of the swivel.

Wand, however, had now reached this point, and, although still unable, owing to the cataracts of water rushing over the schooner, to get upon the spar, he was ready to cut down the first man of the smugglers who should spring to the deck.

A portion of his party were, meanwhile, endeavoring to help aboard the men clinging to the mast outside of the vessel.

These poor fellows were indeed in a perilous situation, their arms aching so from their protracted hold, that they must soon let go, unless assisted.

Ropes, with bowline hitches being thrown to them, they were finally drawn safely to the schooner.

The latter was now alarmingly near the rocks, frowning like black ramparts, right ahead.

“Hold on, lads!” screamed one of the smugglers—“if we can’t take the vessel, we can be the means of her going to Davy Jones! That swivel can’t hit us all!”

This was true. The smugglers having ranged themselves in a line on the spar, could not all be struck by the shot from the gun.

In this critical state of affairs Wand conceived an idea, which he at once put into execution.

Seizing the ax with which one of his enemies had cut down the foremast, he waded to starboard through the water, and swung himself upon that part of the spar by the stump.

The men nearest to him were advancing toward him with uplifted crowbars, when, raising his ax on high, he held it above the main topmast stay, which, the other rigging having by this time parted, was all that prevented the mast from going overboard!

"Into the hold!" he thundered, "or by heaven, I *will* set you all adrift with one blow of this ax!"

The smugglers stood appalled. On one side of them the swivel—on the other the men with cutlasses, reinforced by their saved shipmates ready to cut them down if they sprung to the deck—on the other Wand, ax in hand, prepared to sever the stay, and thus set them adrift!

There was no help for it—they were baffled, and, with a howl of disappointment, they plunged into the forehold, over which some of the sailors, after hoisting up their injured shipmates, secured the hatches.

The plan of the smugglers thus defeated, Wand now, assisted by Percival, exerted himself to save the schooner from going on the rocks, toward which she was drifting with frightful rapidity.

The foremast having gone, there was danger of the main soon going also.

In fact the wrecked mast had scarcely been set adrift, and the schooner thus cleared of a most unwelcome incumbrance, when, with a crash, over went the mainmast.

Ax in hand, Percival, quick as lightning, cleared away the spar, when there was the hull of the blue clipper rolling a dismasted wreck.

Driven straight toward the rocks, it seemed as if all that remained of the unfortunate vessel must go to pieces.

Both anchors, however, were cleared away, and, as the wind had hauled around a little to the eastward, it was hoped that they would hold.

The right and left bower were both let go; and never was the result more anxiously watched than it was by Percival and Wand.

On went the wreck toward the rocks—the outer edges of the latter were now not more than ten fathoms distant! Wand set his teeth hard—the gray eyes of Percival gleamed.

On went the wreck.

"She will strike!" said Wand, despondingly.

Both men sprung upon the knight-heads and peered over, expecting to hear the grating of the schooner's keel, striking bottom.

Just then there was a jerk—the hull swung round, within ~~six~~ fathoms of the rocks, and there remained stationary.

"SHE HOLDS!" echoed both men, in their joy clasping each other's hands.

Wand resolved to remain here until the storm should abate and he could rig new masts.

The gale blew heavily, until midnight, when it sunk to a good steady off-shore breeze, so that there was now not the slightest danger of the hull's dragging.

In the morning Wand, with his boats, turned the wreck further from the rocks; then he anchored both by the head and the stern. Preparations for getting up new masts were now made. There were plenty of spare spars aboard, so that the work progressed rapidly. In about a fortnight the spars were rigged and yards and sails adjusted.

"Thank Heaven," said Mary, on the evening before they were to sail, "our troubles are now over."

"I hope so," he answered. "With the fair wind we now have, we will reach New Orleans in a few days."

"Why not sail to-night?"

"There is a little work yet to be done aloft. It will be all finished by eight o'clock to-morrow."

The lovers walked the deck for some time, enjoying the moonlight, which, on this night, made objects seem almost as clear as in the daytime.

After Mary had gone below, Wand walked forward to see that every thing was there as it should be. He was about returning aft, when he heard a voice in the hold:

"Captain! captain! I am nearly stifled!"

"Who is that?" he exclaimed.

"Me—Captain Malo," was answered. "For God's sake let me come on deck and get a little fresh air! I am sick and dizzy!"

Common humanity urged Wand to comply, and Malo was soon on deck.

Confinement and grief had made a strange alteration in his appearance. His face, formerly so dark and ruddy, was now sallow and haggard, his eyes sunken, and his cheek-bones protruding. His hands were free, but a ball and chain were about his ankles, so that as he now paced the deck, they kept up a dismal clanking.

"You are a shrewd fellow, Captain Wand," said he, "and I acknowledge that the capture of myself and band was most cunningly contrived."

"I did my duty," Wand briefly replied.

"You did more," said Malo, in a hollow voice. "You were the means of my losing my Nettie—my darling child—the pride of her father! The poor thing loved you—more the fool she, as you did not care a straw for her."

"I am very sorry," said Wand—"I never gave her the least encouragement. I can feel for you in the loss of one you loved so well."

"You are a hypocrite!" cried Malo, fiercely—"and what you say is false. You have not given the matter a moment's thought. By heaven! you ought not to live to crow over me and mine! over my capture, and the fact of my daughter's loving you."

"A man were indeed a dastard to crow over a fallen foe, and worse yet over the love of a woman whose love by him is unrequited. No, Captain Malo, you are mistaken if you think I could do that, although I acknowledge I am glad of my success in the path of duty!"

"You shall not live to boast of that success!"

With these words he turned suddenly upon Wand, who was wholly unprepared, caught him by the throat with one hand, and pulling his sword from the young man's belt, drew back the weapon to plunge it into its owner's body.

Wand was a brave man, but so sudden was the assault, that for a moment a shudder passed over him.

In another instant the weapon must have been driven through him, had not the prisoner's wrist been clutched in an iron grasp, and the sword snatched from his hand.

Malo turned, to confront Mad Jack, who, as was subsequently ascertained, had been leaning against the foremast, watching a distant sail to leeward, when the smuggler made his attack upon the young man.

"Back into the hold!" he now cried, pushing Malo away, and returning Wand his sword.

The smuggler gritted his teeth.

"It will be a pleasure to me," continued Percival, "to see such a rascal hanged!"

"You will never have that pleasure," answered Malo.

With these words, he flung himself over the schooner's rail into the sea! Percival and Wand both rushed to the rail, and glanced over, but they never saw Malo again.

He had been dragged down like a shot by the weight of the ball and chain, a few bubbles rising to the surface showing the spot where he had gone down!

A boat was immediately lowered, and a skillful Portuguese diver was sent down, in the hope that Malo might be saved ere life was entirely extinct.

The diver remained under water as long as possible, so that when he came to the surface, some seconds elapsed ere he could regain his breath.

He then stated that the chain had got entangled in a sunken spur of rock, so that he had found it impossible to dislodge the body.

"We will leave it where it is, then," said Percival, "as he must have perished ere this."

They returned aboard to see the decks crowded with sailors, all of whom, by this time, had heard of what had happened.

Both Mary and her father, who had also been disturbed, were on the quarter-deck.

"A fitting doom for a smuggler," said Mr. Clare.

"Ay, ay," answered Percival.

Then Wand related his narrow escape.

Mary shuddered, and half unconsciously encircled him with her arms.

Then, blushing at what she had done, she drew back.

"We will have him out of all danger, before long, now," said Percival. "So cheer up, Miss Clare!"

They remained conversing on deck for several hours.

There was little sleep for Mary that night, thinking of her lover's late peril.

In the morning preparations for sailing were all completed by ten o'clock.

Soon after the vessel went bowling upon her northward course, amid the cheers of all hands, with the stars and stripes at her mizzen.

A few more words.

The Blue Clipper, arriving at New Orleans, was remod-

eled, and fitted into a gallant little cutter, the command of which was given to Wand, who had received a warrant as captain for his valuable services, soon after his union with sweet Mary Clare.

The captured smugglers were dealt with according to law.

Captain Watson committed suicide while his court-martial was being held. Subsequently the whole tribe of Gulf smugglers were driven from their retreat and many of them arrested. Those who escaped were now obliged to abandon their calling, and thus forever was destroyed the League of the Silver Cask.

THE END.

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
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